

NEW YORK Saturday Journal

A POPULAR PAPER FOR PLEASURE AND PROFIT.

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Vol. IV.

BEADIE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS.
David Adams.

NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 14, 1874.

TERMS IN ADVANCE.
One copy, four months, \$1.00.
One copy, one year, \$2.00.
Two copies, one year, \$3.00.

No. 205

THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN. A Strange Story of Texas.

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID.

PROLOGUE

The stag of Texas, reclining in midnight lair, is startled from his slumbers by the hoof-stroke of a horse.

He does not forsake his covert, nor yet rise to his feet. His domain is shared by the wild steed of the savanna, given to nocturnal straying. He only uprears his head; and, with antlers cropping the tall grass, listens for a repetition of the sound.

Again is the hoofstroke heard, but with altered intonation. There is a ring of metal—the clinking of steel against stone.

The sound, significant to the ear of the stag, causes a quick change in his air and attitude. Springing clear of his couch, and bounding a score of yards across the prairie, he pauses to look back upon the disturber of his dreams.

In the clear moonlight of a southern sky, he recognizes the most ruthless of enemies—man. One is approaching upon horseback.

Yielding to instinctive dread, he is about to resume his flight: when something in the appearance of the horseman—some unnatural seeming—holds him transfixed to the spot.

With haunches in quivering contact with the sword, and frontlet faced to the rear, he continues to gaze—his large brown eyes straining upon the intruder in a mingled expression of fear and bewilderment.

What has challenged the stag to such protracted scrutiny? A man, a man on horseback.

The horse is perfect in all its parts—a splendid steed, saddled, bridled, and otherwise completely equipped. In it there appears nothing amiss—nothing to produce either wonder or alarm. But the man—the rider? Ah! About him there is something to cause both—something weird—something wanting.

By heavens! it is the head!

Even the unreasoning animal can perceive this; and, after gazing a moment with wildered eyes—wonders what abnormal monster thus mocks its cervine intelligence—terror-stricken, it continues its retreat; nor again pauses till it has plunged through the waters of the Leona, and placed the current of the stream between itself and the ghastly intruder.

Headless of the affrighted deer—either of its presence or precipitate flight—the HEADLESS HORSEMAN rides on.

Ho, too, is going in the direction of the river. Unlike the stag, he does not seem pressed for time; but advances in a slow, tranquil pace; so silent as to seem ceremonious.

Apparently absorbed in solemn thought, he gives free rein to his steed; permitting the animal, at intervals, to snatch a mouthful of the herbage growing by the way. Nor does he, by voice or gesture, urge it impatiently onward, when the howl-bark of the prairie-wolf causes it to fling its head on high, and stand snorting in its tracks.

He appears to be under the influence of some all-absorbing emotion, from which no common incident can awaken him. There is no speech—not a whisper—to betray its nature. The startled stag, his own horse, the wolf, and the midnight moon, are the sole witnesses of his silent abstraction.

His shoulders shrouded under a serape, one edge of which, flung up by the wind, displays a portion of his figure: his limbs incased in "water-guard" of jaguar-skin; thus sufficiently sheltered against the dews of the night, or the showers of a tropical sky, he rides on—silent as the stars shining above, unconcerned as the clouds that chirrup in the grass beneath, or the prairie breeze playing with the drapery of his dress.

Something at length appears to rouse from his reverie, and stimulate him to greater speed—his steed, at the same time. The latter tossing up his head, gives utterance to a joyous neigh; and, with outstretched neck and spread nostrils, advances in a gut gradually increasing to a canter. The proximity of the river explains the altered pace.

The horse halts not again, till the crystal current is surging against its flanks, and the legs of his rider are submerged knee-deep under the surface.

The animal eagerly assuages its thirst; crosses to the opposite side; and with vigorous stride, ascends the sloping bank.

Upon the crest occurs a pause: as if the rider tarried till his steed should shake the water from his flanks. There is a rattling of saddle-flaps, and stirrup-leathers, resembling thunder, amidst a cloud of vapor, white as the spray of a cataract.

Out of this self-constituted nimbus, the HEADLESS HORSEMAN emerges; and moves onward, as before.

Apparently prickled by the spur, and guided by the rein, of his rider, the horse no longer strays from the track; but steps briskly forward, as if upon a path already trodden.

A treeless savanna stretches before—selvedged by the sky. Outlined against the azure is seen the imperfect centaurian shape gradually dissolving in the distance, till it becomes lost to view, under the mystic gleaming of the moonlight!

CHAPTER I.
THE BURNT PRAIRIE.

On the great plain of Texas, about a hundred miles southward from the old Spanish town of San Antonio de Bajar, the noonday



Headless of the affrighted deer—either of its presence or precipitate flight—the Headless Horseman rides on.

sun is shedding his beams from a sky of cerulean brightness. Under the golden light appears a group of objects, but little in unison with the landscape around them; since they betoken the presence of human beings, in a spot where there is no sign of human habitation.

The objects in question are easily identified—even at a great distance. They are wagons; each covered with its ribbed, and rounded till of snow-white "Osnaburgh."

There are ten of them—scarce enough to constitute a "caravan" of traders, nor yet a "government train." They are more likely the individual property of an emigrant, who has landed upon the coast, and is wending his way to one of the late-formed settlements on the Leona.

Slowly crawling across the savanna, it could scarce be told that they are in motion, but for their relative position, in long serried line, indicating the order of march.

The dark bodies between each two declare that the teams are attached; and that they are making progress is proved, by the retreating antelope, scared from its noonday siesta, and the long-shanked curlew, rising, with a strange screech from the sward—both bird and beast wondering at the string of strange behemoths, thus invading their wilderness domain.

Elsewhere upon the prairie, no movement may be detected—either bird or quadruped. It is the time of day when all tropical life becomes torpid, or seeks repose in the shade; man alone, stimulated by the love of gain, or the promptings of ambition, disregarding the laws of nature, and defying the frown of the sun.

So seems it with the owner of the tilted train; who, despite the relaxing influence of the fierce mid-day heat, keeps moving on.

That he is an emigrant—and not one of the ordinary class—is evidenced in a variety of ways. The ten large wagons of Pittsburgh build, each hauled by eight able-bodied mules; their miscellaneous contents, plenteous provisions, articles of costly furniture, even of luxuries, live stock in the shape of colored women and children; the groups of black and yellow bondsmen, walking alongside, or straggling foot-sore in the rear; the traveling carriage in the lead, drawn by a span of sleek-coated Kentucky mules, and driven by a black Jehu, sweltering in a suit of livery; all bespeak, not a poor Northern-State settler in search of a new home, but a rich Southerner, who has already purchased one, and is on his way to take possession of it.

And this is the exact story of the train. It is the property of a planter who has landed at Indianola on the gulf of Matagorda, and is now traveling overland—en route for his destination.

In the cortege that accompanies it, riding habitually at its head, is the planter himself—Woodley Poindexter—a tall, thin man of fifty, with a slightly sallowish complexion, and aspect proudly severe. He is simply, though not inexpensively clad; in a loosely-fitting frock of alpaca cloth, a waistcoat of black satin, and trowsers of nankin. A shirt of finest linen shows its plaits through the opening of his vest—its collar embraced by a piece of black ribbon; while the shoe, resting in the stirrup, is of finest tanned leather. His features are shaded by a broad-brimmed Leghorn hat.

Two horsemen are riding alongside—one on his right, the other on his left—a stripling scarce twenty, and a young man six or seven years older. The former is his son—a youth whose open, cheerful countenance contrasts, not only with the severe aspect of his father, but with the somewhat sinister features on the other side, and which belong to his cousin.

The youth is dressed in a French blouse of sky-colored "cottonade," with trowsers of the same material; a most appropriate costume for a southern climate, and which, with the Panama hat upon his head, is equally becoming.

The cousin, an ex-officer of volunteers, affects a military undress of dark blue cloth, with a forage cap to correspond.

There is another horseman riding near, who, on account of having a white skin—not white for all that—is entitled to description. His coarser features, and cheaper habiliments; the keel-colored cow-hide clutched in his right hand, and flitted with such evident skill, proclaim him the overseer and whipper-up of the swarthy pedestrians composing the entourage of the train.

The traveling carriage, which is a "carriole"—a sort of cross between a Jersey wagon and a barouche—has two occupants. One is a young lady of the whitest skin; the other a girl of the blackest. The former is the daughter of Woodley Poindexter—his only daughter. She of the sable complexion is the young lady's handmaid.

The emigrating party is from the "coast" of the Mississippi—from Louisiana. The planter is not himself a native of this State—in other words, a *Creeole*; but the type is exhibited in the

countenance of his son—still more in that fair face, seen occasionally through the curtains of the carriole, and whose delicate features declare descent from one of those indorsed damsels—*filles a la cassette*—who, more than a hundred years ago, came across the Atlantic with proofs of their virtue—in the *casket*!

A grand sugar planter of the South is Woodley Poindexter; one of the highest and haughtiest of his class, one of the most profuse in aristocratic hospitalities; hence the necessity of forsaking his Mississippian home, and transferring himself and his "penates"—with only a remnant of his "niggers,"—to the wilds of south-western Texas.

The sun is upon the meridian line, and almost in the zenith. The travelers tread upon their own shadows. Enervated by the excessive heat, the white horsemen sit silently in their saddles. Even the dusky pedestrians, less sensible to its influence, have ceased their garulous "cumbos" and, in straggling groups, shamble listlessly along the rear of the wagons.

The silence—solemn as that of a funeral procession—is interrupted, only at intervals by the pistol-like crack of a whip, or the loud "wo-ha," delivered in deep baritone from the thick lips of some sable teamster.

Slowly the team moves on, as if groping its way. There is no regular road. The route is indicated by the wheel-marks of some vehicles that have passed before—barely conspicuous, by having crushed the culms of the short grass.

Notwithstanding the slow progress, the teams are doing their best. The planter believes himself within less than twenty miles of the end of his journey. He hopes to reach it before night; hence the march continued through the mid-day heat.

Unexpectedly the drivers are directed to pull up, by a sign from the overseer, who has been riding a hundred yards in the advance, and who is seen to make a sudden stop—as if some obstruction had presented itself.

He comes trotting back toward the train. His gestures tell of something amiss. What is it?

There has been much talk about Indians—a probability of their being encountered in this quarter.

Can it be the red-skinned marauders? Scarcely; the gestures of the overseer do not betray actual alarm.

"What is it, Mr. Sansom?" asked the planter, as the man rode up.

"The grass air burnt. The prairie's been afire."

"Been on fire! Is it on fire now?" hurriedly inquired the owner of the wagons, with an apprehensive glance toward the traveling carriage. "Where? I see no smoke!"

"No, sir—no," stammered the overseer, becoming conscious that he had caused unnecessary alarm; "I didn't say it air afire now; only that it hez been, an' the hal ground air as black as the ten o' spades!"

"Ta—tat! what of that? I suppose we can travel over a black prairie as safely as a green one!"

"What nonsense of you, Josh Sansom, to raise such a row about nothing, frightening the people out of their senses! Ho! there, you niggers! Lay the leather to your teams, and let the train proceed. Whip up!—whip up!"

"But, Captain Calhoun," protested the overseer, in response to the gentleman who had reproached him in such severe terms, "how air we to find the way?"

"Find the way! What are you raving about? We haven't lost it—have we?"

"I'm afeard we hev, though. The wheel-tracks ain't no longer to be seen. They're burnt out, along wif the grass."

"What matters that? I reckon we can cross a piece of scorched prairie, without wheel-marks to guide us? We'll find them again on the other side."

"Ye-es," naively responded the overseer, who, although a "down-easter," had been far enough west to have learnt something of frontier life; "if their air any other side, I keda' see it out o' the saddle—he'er a sign o' it."

"Whip up, niggers! whip up!" shouted Calhoun, without heeding the remark; and spurring onward, as a sign that the order was to be obeyed.

The teams are again set in motion, and, after advancing to the edge of the burnt track, without instructions from any one, are once more brought to a stand.

The white men on horseback draw together for a consultation. There is need; as all are satisfied by a single glance directed to the ground before them.

Far as the eye can reach the country is of one uniform color—black as Erebus. There is nothing green—not a blade of grass—not a reed nor weed.

It is after the summer solstice. The ripened culms of *gramineae*, and the prairie flowers, have alike crumbled into dust under the devastating breath of fire.

In front—on the right and left—to the utmost verge of vision extends the scene of desolation. Over it the cerulean sky is changed to a darker blue; the sun, though clear of clouds, seems to scowl rather than shine—as if reciprocating the frown of the earth.

The overseer has made a correct report—there is no trail visible. The action of the fire,

as it raged among the ripe grass, has eliminated the impression of the wheels hitherto indicating the route.

"What are we to do?" The planter himself put this inquiry, in a tone that told of a vacillating spirit.

"Do, uncle Woodley! What else but keep straight on? The river must be on the other side! If we don't hit the crossing, to a half-mile or so, we can go up or down the bank—as the case may require."

"But, Cassius, if we should lose our way?" "We can't. There's but a patch of this, I suppose? If we do go a little astray, we must come out somewhere—on one side, or the other."

"Well, nephew, you know best: I shall be guided by you."

"No fear, uncle. I've made my way out of a worse fix than this. Drive on, niggers! Keep straight after me!"

The ex-officer of volunteers, casting a condescending glance toward the traveling carriage—through the curtains of which appears a fair face, slightly shadowed with anxiety—gives the spur to his horse; and with confident air trots onward.

A chorus of whips cracks is succeeded by the tramping of four-score mules, mingled with the clanking of wheels against their hubs. The wagon-train is once more in motion.

The mules step out with greater rapidity. The sable surface, strange to their eyes, excites them to brisker action—causing them to raise the hoof as soon as it touches the turf. The young animals show fear—snorting as they advance.

In time their apprehensions become allayed; and, taking their cue from their older associates, they move on steadily as before.

A mile or more is made, apparently in a direct line from the point of starting. Then there is a halt. The self-appointed guide has ordered it. He has reined up his horse; and is sitting in the saddle with less show of confidence. He appears to be puzzled about the direction.

The landscape—if such it may be called—has assumed a change; though not for the better. It is still sable as ever to the verge of the horizon. But the surface is no longer a plain; it rolls. There are ridges—gentle undulations—with valleys between. They are not entirely treeless—though nothing that may be termed a tree is in sight. There have been such before the fire—*algarcobias*, *mesquites*, and others of the acacia family—standing solitary or in copses. Their light pinnate foliage has disappeared like the flame before the flame. The existence is only evidenced by charred trunks and blackened boughs.

"You've lost the way, nephew?" said the planter, riding rapidly up.

"No, uncle—not yet. I've only stopped to have a look. It must lie in this direction—down that valley. Let them drive on. We're going all right—I'll answer for that."

Once more in motion—adown the slope—then along the valley—then up the acclivity of another ridge—and then there is a second stoppage upon their crest.

"You've lost the way, Cass?" said the planter, coming up and repeating his former observation.

"Durned if I don't believe I have, uncle!" responded the nephew, in a tone of not very respectful mistrust. "Anyhow, who the deuce could find his way out of an ashpit like this? No, no," he continued, reluctant to betray his embarrassment, as the carriage came up. "I see now. We are all right. The river must be in this direction."

On goes the guide, evidently irresolute. On follow the sable teamsters, who, despite their stupidity, do not fail to note some of the facilitation. They can tell that they are no longer advancing in a direct line; but circuitously among the copses, and across the glades that stretch between.

All are gratified by a shout from the conductor, announcing recovered confidence. In response there is a universal explosion of whips, with joyous exclamations.

Once more they are stretching their teams along a traveled road—where a half-score of wheeled vehicles must have passed before them. And not long before, the wheel-tracks are of recent impress—the hoof-prints of the animals fresh as if made within the hour. A train of wagons, not unlike their own, must have passed over the burnt prairie!

Like themselves, it could only be going toward the Leona; perhaps some government convoy on its way to Fort Inge? In that case they have only to keep in the same track. The fort is on the line of their march—but a short distance beyond the point where their journey is to terminate.

Nothing could be more opportune. The guide, hitherto perplexed—though without acknowledging it—is at once relieved of all anxiety; and with a fresh exhibition of conceit, orders the route to be resumed.

For a mile or more the wagon-tracks are followed—not in a direct line, but bending about among the skeleton copses. The countenance of Cassius Calhoun, for a while wearing a confident look, gradually becomes clouded. It assumes the profoundest expression of despondency, on discovering that the four and forty wheel-tracks he is following have been made by ten Pittsburgh wagons and a carriage—the same that are now following him, and in whose company he has been traveling all the way from Matagorda!

CHAPTER II. THE TRAIL OF THE LAZO.

BEYOND doubt the wagons of Woodley Poindeux were going over ground already traced by the tiring of their wheels.

"Our own tracks!" muttered Calhoun on making the discovery, adding a fierce oath as he reined up.

"Our own tracks! What mean you, Cassius? You don't say we've been traveling?" "On our own tracks, I say, uncle; that very thing. We must have made a complete circumnavigation of it. See! here's the hind hoof of my horse, with half a shoe off; and there's the feet of the niggers. Besides, I can tell the ground. That's the very hill we went down as we left our last stopping place. Hang the crooked neck! We've made a couple of miles for nothing."

Embarrassment is no longer the only expression upon the face of the speaker. It has deepened to chagrin, with an admixture of shame. It is through him that the train is without a regular guide. One, engaged at Indianola, had piloted them to their last camping-place. There, in consequence of some dispute, due to the surly temper of the ex-captain of volunteers, the man had demanded his dismissal and gone back.

For this—as also for an ill-timed display of confidence in his power to conduct the march—is the planter's nephew now suffering under a sense of shame. He feels it keenly as the carriage comes up, and bright eyes become witnesses of his discomfort.

Poindeux does not repeat his inquiry. That the road is lost is a fact evident to all. Even the barefooted or "broganned" pedestrians have recognized their long-heeled footprints,

and become aware that they are for the second time treading upon the same ground.

There is a general halt, succeeded by an animated conversation among the white men. The situation is serious: the planter himself believes it to be so. He can not that day reach the end of his journey—a thing upon which he had set his mind.

That is the very least misfortune that can befall them. There are others possible and probable. There are perils upon the burned plain. They may be compelled to spend the night upon it, with no water for their animals. Perhaps a second day and night—or longer—who can tell how long?

How are they to find their way? The sun is beginning to descend; though still too high in heaven to indicate his line of declination. By waiting awhile they may discover the quarter of a compass.

But to what purpose? The knowledge of east, west, north and south can avail nothing now; they have lost their *line of march*.

Calhoun has become cautious. He no longer volunteers to point out the path. He hesitates to repeat his pioneering experiments—after such manifest and shameful failure.

A ten minutes' discussion ends in nothing. No one can suggest a feasible plan of proceeding. No one knows how to escape from the embrace of that dark desert, which appears to cloud not only the sun and sky, but the countenances of all who enter within its limits.

A flock of black vultures is seen flying afar off. They come nearer and nearer. Some alight upon the ground—others hover above the heads of the strayed travelers. Is there a boding in the behavior of the birds?

Another ten minutes is spent in the midst of moral and physical gloom. Then, as if by a benignant mandate from heaven, does cheerful reassurance its way. The cause? A horseman riding in the direction of the train!

An unexpected sight: who could have looked for human being in such a place? All eyes simultaneously sparkle with joy; as if in the approach of the horseman, they beheld the advent of a savior!

"He's coming this way, is he not?" inquired the planter, scarce confident in his failing sight.

"Yes, father; straight as he can ride," replied Henry, lifting the hat from his head, and waving it on high: the action accompanied by a shout intended to attract the horseman.

The signal was superfluous. The stranger had already sighted the halted wagons; and, riding toward them at a gallop, was soon within speaking distance.

He did not draw bridle until he had passed the train; and arrived upon the spot occupied by the planter and his party.

"A Mexican!" whispered Henry, drawing his deduction from the habiliments of the horseman.

"So much the better," replied Poindeux, in the same tone of voice; he'll be all the more likely to know the road."

"Not a bit of Mexican about him," muttered Calhoun, "excepting the rig. I'll soon see. *Buenos dias, caballero! Esta V. Mexicano?* (Good-day, sir, are you a Mexican?)"

"No, indeed," replied the stranger, with a protesting smile. "Any thing but that. I can speak to you in Spanish, if you prefer it; but I daresay you will understand me better in English: which, I presume, is your native tongue."

Calhoun, suspecting that he had spoken in different Spanish, or indifferently pronounced it, refrains from making rejoinder.

"American, sir," replied Poindeux, his natural pride feeling slightly piqued. Then, as if fearing to offend the man from whom he intended asking a favor, he added, "Yes, sir, we are all Americans—from the Southern States."

"That I can perceive by your following." An expression of contempt—scarce perceptible—showed itself upon the countenance of the speaker, as his eye rested upon the groups of black bondsmen. "I can perceive, too," he added, "that you are strangers to prairie traveling. You have lost your way?"

"We have, sir; and have very little prospect of recovering it, unless we may count upon your kindness to direct us." By the merest chance I came upon your trail, as I was crossing the prairie. I saw you were going astray; and have ridden this way to set you right."

"It is very good of you. We shall be most thankful, sir. My name is Poindeux—Woodley Poindeux, of Louisiana. I have purchased a property on the Leona river, near Fort Inge. We were in hopes of reaching it before nightfall. Can we do so?"

There is nothing to hinder you: if you follow the instructions I shall give."

On saying this, the stranger rode a few paces apart; and appeared to scrutinize the country—as if to determine the direction which the travelers should take.

Poised conspicuously upon the crest of the ridge, horse and man presented a picture worthy of skillful delineation.

A steed, such as might have been ridden by an Arab sheik—broad-bay in color—broad in counter—with limbs clean as culms of cane, and hips of elliptical outline, continued into a magnificent tail sweeping rearward like a rainbow; on his back a rider—a young man of more than five-and-twenty—of noble form and features; habited in the picturesque costume of a Mexican *ranchero*—spencer jacket of velvet—*calzoneros* laced along the seams—*calzonillos* of snow-white lawn—*botas* of buff leather, heavily spurred at the heels—around the waist a scarf of scarlet cape; and on his head a hat of black glaze, banded with gold bullion.

Picture to yourself a horseman thus habited; seated in a deep tree-saddle, of Moorish shape and Mexican manufacture, with housings of leather stamped in antique patterns such as were worn by the caparisoned steeds of the Conquistadores; picture to yourself such a *caballero*, and you will have before your mind's eye a counterpart of him, upon whom the planter and his people were gazing.

Through the curtains of the traveling carriage he was regarded with glances that spoke of a singular sentiment. For the first time in her life, Louisa Poindeux looked upon that hitherto known only to her imagination—a man of heroic mold. Proud might he have been, could he have guessed the interest which his presence was exciting in the breast of the Creole.

He could not and did not. He was not even aware of her existence. He had only glanced at the dust-bedaubed vehicle in passing—as one might look upon the rude incrustation of an oyster, without suspecting that a precious pearl may lie gleaming inside.

"By my faith!" he declared, facing round to the owner of the wagons, "I can discover no landmarks for you to steer by. For all that, I can find the way myself. You will have to cross the Leona five miles below the fort; and, as I have to go by the crossing myself, you can follow the tracks of my horse. Good-day, gentlemen!"

Thus abruptly bidding adieu, he pressed the spur against the side of his steed, and started off at a gallop.

An unexpected—almost unaccountable departure! So thought the planter and his people.

They had no time to make observation upon it before the stranger was seen returning toward them!

In ten seconds he was again in their presence—all listening to learn what had brought him back.

"I fear the tracks of my horse may prove of little service to you. The *mustangs* have been this way since the fire. They have made hoof-marks by the thousand. Mine are shod; but, as you are not accustomed to trailing, you may not be able to distinguish them—the more so, that in these dry ashes all hoof-tracks are so nearly alike."

"What are we to do?" despairingly asked the planter.

"I am sorry, Mr. Poindeux, I can not stay to conduct you. I am riding express, with a dispatch for the Fort. If you should lose my trail, keep the sun on your right shoulder; so that your shadows may fall to the left, at an angle of about fifteen degrees to your line of march. Go straight forward for about five miles. You will then come in sight of the top of a tall tree—a *cypress*. You will know it by its leaves being in the red. Head direct for this tree. It stands on the bank of the river; and close by is the crossing."

The young horseman, once more drawing up his reins, was about to ride off, when something caused him to linger. It was a pair of dark, lustrous eyes—observed by him for the first time—glancing through the curtains of the traveling carriage.

Their owner was in shadow; but there was light enough to show that they were set in a countenance of surpassing loveliness. He perceived, moreover, that they were turned upon himself—fixed, as he fancied, in an expression that betokened interest—almost tenderness!

He returned it with an involuntary glance of admiration, which he made but an awkward attempt to conceal. Lest it might be mistaken for rudeness, he suddenly faced round; and once more addressing himself to the planter—who had just finished thanking him for his civility.

"I am but ill-deserving thanks," was his rejoinder, "thus to leave you with a chance of losing your way. But, as I have told you, my time is measured."

The dispatch-bearer consulted his watch—as though not a little reluctant to travel alone.

"You are very kind, sir," said Poindeux; "but with the direction you have given us, I think we shall be able to manage. The sun will surely show us."

"No; no! I look at the sky; it will not. The clouds loom up on the north. In an hour, the sun may be obscured—at all events, before you can get within sight of the cypress. It will not do. Stay!" he continued, after a reflective pause, "I have a better plan still: follow the trail of my *lazo*!"

While speaking, he had lifted the coiled rope from his saddle-bow, and flung the loose end to the earth—the other being secured to a ring in the pommel. Then raising his hat in graceful salutation—more than half-directed toward the traveling carriage—he gave the spur to his steed; and once more bounded off over the prairie.

The lazo, lengthening out, tightened over the hips of his horse, and, dragging a dozen yards behind, left a line upon the cinerous surface, as if some slender serpent had been making its passage across the plain.

"An exceedingly curious fellow!" remarked the planter, as they stood gazing after the horseman, fast becoming hidden behind a cloud of sable dust. "I ought to have asked him his name?"

"An exceedingly conceited fellow, I should say," muttered Calhoun, who had not failed to notice the glance sent by the stranger in the direction of the carriage, nor that which had challenged it. "As to his name, I don't think it matters much. It mightn't be his own he would give you. Texas is full of such swells, who take new names when they get here—by way of improvement, if for no better reason."

"Come, cousin Cass," protested young Poindeux, "you are unjust to the stranger. He appears to be educated—in fact, a gentleman—worthy of bearing the best of names, I should say."

A gentleman! Doubted unlikely: rigged out in that fanfaron fashion. I never saw a man yet, that took to a Mexican dress, who wasn't a *Jack*. He's one, I'll be bound."

During this brief conversation, the fair occupant of the carriage was seen to bend forward, and direct a look of evident interest after the form of the horseman fast receding from her view.

To this, perhaps, might have been traced the acrimony observable in the speech of Calhoun.

"What is it, Loo?" he inquired, riding close up to the carriage, and speaking in a voice not loud enough to be heard by the others. "You appear impatient to go forward? Perhaps you'd like to ride off along with that swaggering fellow? It isn't too late: I'll lend you my horse."

The young girl threw herself back upon the seat, evidently displeased, both by the speech and the tone in which it was delivered. But her displeasure, instead of expressing itself in a frown, or in the shape of an indignant rejoinder, was concealed under a guise far more gallant to him who had caused it.

A clear, ringing laugh was the only reply vouchsafed to him.

"So, so! I thought there must be something by the way you behaved yourself in his presence. You looked as if you would have relished a *tele-a-tele* with this showy dispatch-bearer. Taken with his stylish dress, I suppose? Fine feathers make fine birds. His are borrowed. I may strip them off some day along with a little of the skin that's under them."

"For shame, Cassius! your words are a scandal!"

"'Tis you should think of scandal, Loo! To let your thoughts turn on a common scamp—a masquerading fellow like that! No doubt the letter-carrier, employed by the officers at the fort!"

"A letter-carrier, you think? Oh, how I should like to get love-letters by such a post-man!"

"You had better hasten on, and tell him so. My horse is at your service."

"Ha! ha! ha! What a simper you show yourself! Suppose, for jesting's sake, I did have a fancy to overtake this prairie postman! It couldn't be done upon that dull steed of yours: not a bit of it! At the rate he is going, he and his blood-bay will be out of sight before you could change saddles for me. Oh, no! he's not to be overtaken by me, however much I might like it; and perhaps I might like it!"

"Don't let your father hear you talk in that way."

"Don't let him hear you talk in that way," retorted the young lady, for the first time speaking in a serious strain. "Though you are my cousin, and papa may think you the pink of perfection, I don't—not I! I never told you I did—did I?"

A frown, evidently called forth by some unsatisfactory reflection, was the only reply to this tantalizing interrogative.

"You are my cousin," she continued, in a

tone that contrasted strangely with the levity she had already exhibited, "but you are nothing more—noting more—Captain Cassius Calhoun! You have no claim to be my counselor. There is but one from whom I am in duty bound to take advice or bear reproach: I therefore presume to repeat such sentiments—as those you have just favored me with. I shall remain mistress of my own thoughts—and actions; too—till I have found a master who can control them. It is not you!"

Having delivered this speech, with eyes flashing—half-angrily, half-contemptuously—upon her cousin, the young Creole once more threw herself back upon the cushions of the carriage.

The closing curtains admonished the ex-officer that further conversation was undesired. Quelling under the lash of indignant innocence, he was only too happy to hear the loud "gee-on" of the teamsters, as the wagons commenced moving over the somber surface—not more somber than his own thoughts.

CHAPTER III. THE PRAIRIE FINGER-POST.

THE travelers felt no further uneasiness about the route. The snake-like trail was continuous; and so plain that a child might have followed it.

It did not run in a right line, but meandering among the thickets; at times turning out of the way, in places where the ground was clear of timber. This had evidently been done with an intent to avoid obstruction to the wagons; since at each of these windings the travelers could perceive that there were breaks, or other inequalities, in the surface.

"How very thoughtful of the young fellow!" remarked Poindeux. "I really feel regret at not having asked for his name. If he belongs to the fort, we shall see him again."

"No doubt of it," assented his son. "I hope we shall."

His daughter, reclining in shadow, overheard the conjectured speech, as well as the rejoinder. She said nothing; but her glance toward Henry seemed to declare that her heart fondly echoed the hope.

Cheered by the prospect of soon terminating a toilsome journey—as also by the pleasant anticipation of beholding, before sunset, his new purchase—the planter was in one of his happiest moods.

His aristocratic bosom was moved by an unusual amount of consciousness to all around him. He chatted familiarly with his overseer; stooped to crack a joke with "Uncle" Scipio, hobbling along on blistered heels; and encouraged "Aunt" Chloe in the transport of her picaresque.

"Marvelous!" might the observer exclaim—misled by such exceptional interludes, so pathetically described by the scribbles in Lucifer's pay—"what a fine patriarchal institution is slavery, after all! After all we have said and done to abolish it! A waste of sympathy—sheer philanthropic folly to attempt the destruction of this ancient edifice—worthy cornerstone to a 'civilized' nation! Oh, ye abolition fanatics! why do ye clamor against it? Know ye not that some must suffer—must work and starve—that others may enjoy the luxury of idleness? That some must be slaves that others may be free?"

Such arguments—at which a world might weep—have been of late but too often urged. Wee to the man who speaks, and the nation that gives ear to them.

The planter's high spirits were shared by his party, Calhoun alone excepted. They were seated in the faces of his black bondsmen, who regarded him as the source, and dispenser, of their happiness or misery—omnipotent—next to God. They loved him less than God, and feared him more; though he was by no means a bad master—that is by comparison. He did not absolutely take delight in torturing them. He liked to see them well fed and clad—their epidermis shining with the exudation of its own oil. These signs bespoke the importance of their proprietor—himself. He was satisfied to let them off with an occasional "coddling"—salutary, he would assure you; and in all his "stock" there was not one black-skin marked with the mutilation of vengeance—a proud boast for a Mississippian slave-owner, and more than most could truthfully lay claim to.

In the presence of such an exemplary owner, no wonder that the cheerfulness was universal—or that the slaves should partake of their master's joy, and give way to their garrulity.

It was not destined that this joyfulness should continue to the end of their journey. It was after a time interrupted—not suddenly, nor by any fault on the part of those indulging in it, but by causes and circumstances over which they had not the slightest control.

As the stranger had predicted, the sun ceased to be visible, before the cypress came in sight.

There was nothing in this to cause apprehension. The line of the lazo was conspicuous as ever; and they needed no guidance from the sun, only that his cloud-eclipse produced a corresponding effect upon their spirits.

"One might suppose it close upon nightfall," observed the planter, drawing out his pocket-watch, and glancing at its dial; "and yet it's only three o'clock! Lucky the young fellow has left us such a sure guide. But for him, we might have floundered among these ashes till sundown; perhaps have been compelled to sleep upon them."

"A black bed it would be," jokingly rejoined Henry, with the design of rendering the conversation more cheerful. "Ugh! I should have such ugly dreams were I to sleep upon them."

"And I too," added his sister, protruding her pretty face through the curtains, and taking a survey of the surrounding scene. "I'm sure I should dream of Tartarus, and Pluto, and Prosperine, and—"

"Hya! hya! hya!" grinned the black Jehu, on the box—enrolled in the plantation books as *Pluto Poindeux*.—"De young Missa dream 'bout me in de mids' of dis black prairie! Golly! dat am a good joke—berry! Hya! hya! hya!"

"Don't be too sure, all of ye," said the nephew, at this moment coming up, and taking part in the conversation—don't be too sure that you won't have to make your beds upon it yet. I hope it may be no worse."

"What mean you, Cass?" inquired the uncle.

"I mean, uncle, that that fellow's been misleading us. I won't say it for certain; but it looks ugly. We've come more than five miles—six, I should say—and where's the tree? I've examined the horizon, with a pair of as good eyes as most have got, I reckon; and there isn't such a thing in sight."

"But why should the stranger have deceived us?"

"Ah—why? That's just it. There may be more reasons than one."

"Give us one, then!" challenged a silvery voice from the carriage. "We've all ears to hear it!"

"You're all ears to take in anything that's told you by a stranger," sneeringly replied Calhoun. "I suppose if I gave my reason, you'd be so charitable as to call it a false alarm!"

"That depends on its character, Master Cassius. I think you might venture to try us. We scarcely expect a false alarm from a soldier, as well as traveler, of your experience."

Calhoun felt the taunt; and would probably have withheld the communication he had intended to make, but for Poindeux himself.

"Come, Cassius, explain yourself!" demanded the planter, in the tone of respectful authority. "You have said enough to excite something more than curiosity. For what reason should the young fellow be leading us astray?"

"Well, uncle," answered the ex-officer, "treating a little from his original accusation. 'I haven't said for certain that he is; only that it looks like it.'"

"Well, one don't know what may happen. Traveling parties are strong, and stronger than we have been attacked on these plains, and plundered of everything—murdered."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Louise, in a tone of terror, more affected than real.

"By Indians, indeed! Sometimes it may be, and sometimes, too, they may be whites who play at that game—not all Mexican whites, neither. It only needs a bit of brown paint; a horsehair wig, with half a dozen feathers stuck into it; that, and plenty of hulla-ballooing. If we were to be robbed by a party of white Indians, it wouldn't be the first time the thing's been done. We as good as half deserve it—for our greenness, in trusting too much to a stranger."

"Good heavens, nephew! this is a serious accusation. Do you mean to say that the dispatch-rider—if he be one—is leading us into an ambushade?"

"No, uncle; I don't say that. I only say that such things have been done; and it's possible he may."

"But not probable," emphatically interposed the voice from the carriage, in a tone tauntingly quizzical.

"No!" exclaimed the striding Henry, who, although riding a few paces ahead, had overheard the conversation. "Your suspicions are unjust, cousin Cassius. I pronounce them a calumny. What's more, I can prove them so. Look there!"

The youth had reined up his horse, and was pointing to an object placed conspicuously by the path; which, before speaking, he had carefully scrutinized. It was a tall plant of the *columbar cactus*, whose green, succulent stem had escaped scathing by the fire.

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"Giants, or ghouls!" jokingly suggested Calhoun; "eggs from some other world, who've taken a fancy to have a promenade on this abominable prairie!"

The ex-officer was only humorous with an effort. As well as the others, he was under the influence of an uneasy feeling.

And no wonder. Against the northern horizon had suddenly appeared a number of ink-colored columns—half-a-score of them—unlike any thing ever seen before. They were not of regular columnar form, nor fixed in any way; but constantly changing size, shape and place—now steadfast for a time—now gliding over the cleared surface like giants upon skates—anon bending and balancing toward one another in the most fantastic figurings!

It required no great effort of imagination to fancy the Titans of old, resuscitated on the prairies of Texas, leading a measure after some wild carousal in the company of Bacchus!

In the proximity of phenomena never observed before—unearthly in their aspect—unknown to every individual of the party—it was but natural these should be inspired with alarm.

And such was the fact. A sense of danger pervaded every bosom. All were impressed with a belief that they were in the presence of some peril of the prairie.

A general halt had been made on first observing the strange object; the negroes on foot, as well as the teamsters, giving utterance to shouts of terror. The animals—mules as well as horses, had come instinctively to a stand—the latter neighing and trembling—the former filling the air with their shrill screams.

These were not the only sounds. From the sable towers could be heard a hoarse, swishing noise, that resembled the sough of a waterfall—at intervals breaking into reverberations like the roll of musketry, or the detonations of distant thunder!

These noises were gradually growing louder and more distinct. The danger, whatever it might be, was drawing nearer!

Consternation became depicted on the countenances of the travelers, Calhoun's forming no exception. The ex-officer no longer pretended levity. The eyes of all were turned toward the lowering sky, and the band of black columns that appeared to be coming on to crush them!

At this crisis a shout, reaching their ears from the opposite side, was a source of relief—despite the unmistakable accent of alarm in which it was uttered.

"Turning, they beheld a horseman in full gallop—riding, distant toward them."

The horse was black as coal: the rider of like hue, even to the skin of his face. For all that he was recognized: as the stranger, upon the trail of whose lazo they had been traveling.

The perceptions of woman are quicker than those of man: the young lady within the carriage was the first to identify him.

"Onward!" he cried, as soon as within speaking distance. "On—on! as fast as you can drive!"

What is it?" demanded the planter, in bewildered alarm. "Is there a danger?"

"I don't know. I did not anticipate it, as I passed you. It was only after reaching the river I saw the sure signs of it."

"Of what, sir?"

"The northern."

"You mean the storm of that name?"

"I do."

"I never heard of its being dangerous," interposed Calhoun, "except to vessels at sea. It's precious cold, I know; but—"

"You'll find it worse than cold, sir," interrupted the young horseman, "if you're not quick in getting out of its way. Mr. Poin-dexter," he continued, "you have no plan to escape, except by speed. If you do not make haste, it will be too late. In ten minutes' time you may be enveloped, and then—quick, sir, I entreat you! Order your drivers to hurry forward as fast as they can! The sky—heaven itself—commands you!"

"We've been wondering—didn't know what to make of them."

"They're nothing—only the precursors of the storm. Look beyond! Don't you see a coal-black cloud spreading over the sky? That's what you have to dread. I don't wish to cause you unnecessary alarm; but I tell you there's death in yonder shadow! It's in motion, and coming this way. You have no plan to escape, except by speed. If you do not make haste, it will be too late. In ten minutes' time you may be enveloped, and then—quick, sir, I entreat you! Order your drivers to hurry forward as fast as they can! The sky—heaven itself—commands you!"

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"We've been wondering—didn't know what to make of them."

—which Poin-dexter, assisted by the overseers, hastened to direct the execution of—the young horseman galloped toward the front.

"Madame!" said he, reining up alongside the carriage, and speaking with as much suavity as the circumstances would admit of, "you must close the curtains all round. Your coachman will have to get inside; and you, gentlemen!" he continued, addressing himself to Henry and Calhoun—"and you, sir," to Poin-dexter, who had just come up. "There will be room for all. Inside, I beseech you! Lose no time. In a few seconds the storm will be upon us!"

"And you, sir?" inquired the planter, with a show of interest in the man who was making such exertions to secure them against some yet unascertained danger. "What of yourself?"

"Don't waste a moment upon me. I know what's coming. It isn't the first time I have encountered it. In—in, I entreat you! You haven't a second to spare. Listen to that shriek! Quick, or the dust-cloud will be around us!"

The planter and his son sprung together to the ground; and retreated into the traveling carriage.

Calhoun, refusing to dismount, remained stiffly seated in his saddle. Why should he skulk from a visionary danger, that did not deter a man in Mexican garb?

The latter turned away, as he did so, directing the overseer to get inside the nearest wagon—a direction which was obeyed with alacrity—and, for the first time, the stranger was left free to take care of himself.

Quickly unfolding his serape—hitherto strapped across the cantle of his saddle—he flung it over the head of his horse. Then drawing the edges back, he fastened it, bag fashion, around the animal's neck. With equal alertness he undid his scarf of China crape; and stretched it around his sombrero—fixing it in such a way, that one edge was held under the bullion band, while the other dropped over the brim—thus forming a silken visor for his face.

Before finally closing it, he turned once more toward the carriage; and, to his surprise, saw Calhoun still in the saddle. Humanity triumphed over a feeling of incipient aversion.

"Once again, sir, I adjure you to get inside! If you do not you'll have cause to repent it. Within ten minutes' time, you may be a dead man!"

The positive emphasis with which the caution was delivered produced its effect. In the presence of a mortal foe, Cassius Calhoun was no coward. But there was an enemy approaching that was not mortal—not in any way understood. It was already making itself manifest, in tones that resembled thunder—in shadows that mocked the darkness of midnight. Who would not have felt fear at the approach of a destroyer so declaring itself?

The ex-officer was unable to resist the united warnings of earth and heaven; and, slipping out of his saddle with a show of reluctance—intended to save appearances—he clambered into the carriage, and ensconced himself behind the closely drawn curtains.

To describe what followed is beyond the power of the pen. No eye beheld the spectacle; for none dared look upon it. Even had this been possible, nothing could have been seen. In five minutes after the muffling of the mules, the train was enveloped in worse than Cimmerian darkness.

The opening scene can alone be depicted: for that only was observed by the travelers. One of the sable columns, moving in the advance, broke as it came in collision with the wagon-train. Down came a shower of black dust, as if the sky had commenced raining gunpowder! It was a foretaste of what was to follow.

There was a short interval of open atmosphere—hot as the inside of an oven. Then succeeded puffs, and whirling gusts, of wind—cold as if projected from caves of ice, and accompanied by a noise as though all the trumpets of Eolus were announcing the advent of a storm-king!

In another instant the northern was around them; and the wagon train, halted on a subterranean plain, was enveloped in an atmosphere, akin to that which conceals the icebergs of the Arctic Ocean!

Nothing more was seen—nothing heard, save the whistling of the wind, or its hoarse roaring, as it thundered against the tilts of the wagons. The mules having instinctively turned stern toward it, stood silent in the traces; and the voices of the travelers, in solemn converse inside, could not be distinguished amid the howling of the hurricane.

Every aperture had been closed, for it was soon discovered, that to show a face from under the sheltering canvas was to court suffocation. The air was surcharged with ashes, lifted aloft from the burnt plain, and reduced by the whirling of the wind, to an impalpable but poisonous powder.

For over an hour did the atmosphere carry this cinereous cloud; during which period lasted the imprisonment of the travelers.

At length a voice, speaking close by the curtains of the carriage, announced their release.

"You can come forth!" said the stranger, the crape scarf thrown back above the brim of his hat. "You will still have the storm on your contentment against. It will last to the end of your journey; and, perhaps, for three days longer. But you have nothing further to fear. The ashes are all swept off. They've gone before you, and you're not likely to overtake them this side of the Rio Grande."

"Sir!" said the planter, hastily descending the steps of the carriage, "we have to thank you for—"

"For our lives, father!" cried Henry, supplying the proper words. "I hope, sir, you will favor us with your name?"

"Maurice Gerald!" returned the stranger; "though at the fort you will find me better known as Maurice the mustanger."

"A mustanger!" scornfully muttered Calhoun, but only loud enough to be heard by Louise.

"Only a mustanger!" reflected the aristocratic Poin-dexter, the fervor of his gratitude becoming sensibly chilled.

"For guide, you will no longer need either myself, or my lazo," said the hunter of wild horses. "The cypress is in sight; keep straight toward it. After crossing, you will see the flag over the fort. You may yet reach your journey's end before night. I have no time to tarry, and must say adieu."

Seizing himself, astride a Tartarean steed, could not have looked more like the devil than did Maurice the Mustanger, as he separated for the second time from the planter and his party.

But neither his ashy envelope, nor the announcement of his humble calling, did aught to damage him in the estimation of one, whose thoughts were already predisposed in his favor—Louise Poin-dexter.

On hearing him declare his name—by presumption already known to her—she but more tenderly cherished the bit of cardboard, chafing against her snow-white bosom; at the same time muttering in soft, pensive soliloquy, heard only by herself:

"Maurice the mustanger! despite your sooty covering—despite your modest pretense—you

have touched the heart of a Creole maiden. *Mon dieu—mon dieu! He is too like Lucifer for me to despise him.*"

(To be continued.)

ONE-ARMED ALF, The Giant Hunter of the Great Lakes; OR, THE MAID OF MICHIGAN.

A ROMANCE OF THE WAR OF 1812.
BY OLL COOMES.

AUTHOR OF "DEATH-NOTCH," "BOY SEY," "OLD SOLDIER," "HAWKEYE HARRY," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XX.
MALAGUA'S TREACHERY.

The savage yell that thrilled out upon the night and forest around the old French fortress froze every heart almost with terror that was within the inclosure, and motionless as statues the fugitives stood, expecting every moment to see a horde of savage demons come swarming over the broken dilapidated walls to strike them down in death. But in this they were thankfully disappointed. For some reason or other the attack was never made. It is probable the foe overestimated the number within the fort and was afraid to attack. They had hoped to frighten the whites into a quiet submission without an appeal to arms.

Closely followed by Malagua, the Indian guide, Hellice Arvine and Margery Bliss ran back and joined their friends at the cabins. They found the women and children huddled in one corner like a flock of frightened deer, while the men, with blanched faces, stood with rifles in hand ready for the threatened ordeal.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Colonel Bliss, "what does this mean? Are we to be attacked and butchered alive?"

"No; Indians no strike now—will by um-by. Lots of them, here, there, this way and that way," answered Malagua; "Injuns all around."

"Do you think it will be worth our while to attempt to hold out against them?" the colonel questioned.

"There are very many of them—few of us." "From that I infer we are in great danger."

"The darkness that hides the sun is the only help that is near us. He help us to get away." "Then you advise a retreat from here under cover of the night, do you?"

"Yes," replied Malagua. "I am afraid we will never get away from here alive," said one of the women, hopelessly.

"Don't give up, Mrs. Harris," said the colonel; "there's hope as long as there is life." By this time all had grown quiet without. The Indians had kept their distance, and the silence that now prevailed convinced the fugitives that it was the premonition of a coming storm. So they decided to take Malagua's advice, and make their escape from the fort under cover of the darkness, just as soon as possible.

Dispositions for the hazardous undertaking were at once begun. It was arranged that Malagua should conduct the women and children, one or two at a time, from the fort, out to some point of safety where the men, one by one, were to join them.

Malagua's course was soon decided upon. The spring that welled from the center of the inclosure had worn a deep channel down across the open court, under the edge of the fort, and on down the hill to where it emptied into a nameless creek. The edges of this channel were fringed with weeds and bushes which formed an archway of foliage. Along this the red guide was to conduct the fugitives, trusting to the ripple of the water over the stony bed to drown all sounds that might be made in the transit.

When all was ready for departure, the question arose as to which of the females should go first. This, however, was soon settled by the brave and peerless Hellice Arvine, who expressed her desire and willingness to depart in a nameless creek. The edges of this channel were fringed with weeds and bushes which formed an archway of foliage. Along this the red guide was to conduct the fugitives, trusting to the ripple of the water over the stony bed to drown all sounds that might be made in the transit.

In a minute all was ready, and as they turned to leave, Malagua approached Margery Bliss, who stood a little to one side and said:

"Margery go too, if you want to." There was something in the guide's voice, as well as his looks, that struck Margery as being a little singular; but unsophisticated as she was in the Indian character, she failed to read the hidden meaning of the scout's permission, and eager to be with Hellice, she expressed an earnest desire to accompany her and the Indian.

Her father, however, objected to this, but when Malagua expressed himself in favor of her going, for the reason that, by going by two, the time of getting all from the fort would be shortened one-half, the colonel gave way and his daughter departed with the guide and Hellice.

They entered the channel, before described, a short distance from the spring, and found that they could move along at the edge of the water dry shod. They walked quite rapidly, but in perfect silence, and were soon outside of the fort and within the dense shadows of the woods. Here they advanced with less fear of discovery, and in a few minutes more had reached the creek.

Malagua now conducted them into a dense thicket at the edge of the stream; then, having enjoined the utmost silence and precaution upon them, he took his departure for the fort again.

Hand in hand the maidens stood in the dense, dark thicket, a thousand fearful thoughts chasing each other through their excited minds, while the throbbing of their young hearts seemed to still all else around them.

Several minutes had thus passed when the soft tread of moccasined feet caught their ears; then a figure glided into the thicket, and, approaching them, said, in a low, startled whisper:

"Bad Injuns on our trail—see us somehow—find us soon—come—must hurry away!"

It was the voice of Malagua, and the news he bore almost froze the hearts of the maidens with terror.

"Can we not get back to the fort, Malagua?" Hellice finally asked, in a tremulous whisper.

"No," he replied, "the Injuns are too near—no danger—go back then and get friends."

He grasped them almost rudely by the arms and hurried them almost toward the creek. When he reached the water's brink he paused and drew a canoe from under some drooping willows. Into this craft he hurried the maidens; then entering himself, he took up the paddle, turned the prow of the craft downstream and sent it flying over the water.

All this change had been made so quickly that the girls had scarcely time for a second thought. But, when Hellice had recovered somewhat from her surprise and fear, she began to grow suspicious of Malagua's sudden and violent actions. He did not act with his usual calm deliberation, but manifested great excitement, and took no pains to avoid making a noise with his paddle.

"Will our enemies not hear the dip of your paddle, Malagua?" she finally asked.

"Not half so quick as they will the young squaw's voice. Let her keep still."

This stern, rude reply went like a dagger to Hellice's heart. Malagua had never spoken to her in such language before, and she saw that all the wickedness of the Indian character was cropping out through the

SUNRISE AND SUNSET:
As viewed in the Tropical Seas.

BY CHARLES OLLIVANT.

How beautiful 'tis to behold
His pathway bathed in lustrous gold,
The sun his daily course to keep
Rising from out the stormy deep—
The ocean of the tropic world,
Where flags are rarely seen unfurled.

Then up into the heavens wheel,
Casting the mind of man to feed
How vain it is to try to read
The untold wonders of God's creed—
The mystic lore yet so profound
In palace, cot, or tented field.

How beautiful it is to see
The sun dip in the purple sea;
As slowly rolling down the west
On gorgeous pillows to his rest,
Tinting the clouds with colors bright,
Ere fall on Earth the shades of night.

Then with a flicker and a blaze
Vanish from our wondering gaze,
Leaving unto the soul of man
Thoughts which soar, and try to span
Thy boundless Universe, oh, Lord,
And pierce the mysteries of Thy word.

Gentleman George:

OR,

PARLOR, PRISON, STAGE AND STREET.
A STRANGE ROMANCE OF NEW YORK LIFE.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

AUTHOR OF "THE MAN FROM TEXAS," "HAD DETECTIVE,"
"ROCKY MOUNTAIN BOY," "WOLF DESIGN," "OVER-
LAND KIT," "RED MAZEPER," "AGE OF
SPADES," "HEART OF PEARL," ETC.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TRIAL.

In just two weeks from the day of Gentleman George's arrest his trial came. His lawyer, the ponderous Three-Decker, had vainly tried to stave off the trial, but the officers of the law, urged on by a healthy public sentiment manifested by the newspaper clamor for justice, pressed the case to an early hearing, and so Gentleman George was produced in open court to answer the law that he had outraged.

The doctors who attended to the wounded policeman, struck down by the ball of the river plunderer, testified as to the nature of the hurt that the officer had received, and stated, too, that even now the recovery of the man was a matter of doubt; that the chances for life were fully even with the chances for death. Then the policemen who were with the wounded man in the boat were placed upon the stand, one by one, and testified as to the manner in which the wounded man had received his hurt.

So far this was but the usual course and routine of the legal machinery, and implicated no one as being the author of the outrage. Then Mickey Shea took the stand and told a plain, straightforward story as to the work of the night when the rats of the river had relieved the British captain of the Golden Dragon of his diamond charge. He told how he had been enticed into joining the river thieves by the prisoner at the bar, Gentleman George, as he was nicknamed, or George Dominick, as he should be called; how, in a moment of weakness, he had yielded to the temptation and had joined Dominick and his companions in their raid upon the Liverpool liner. He then described embarking in a boat at the foot of Market street with the masked men—how they had given him a mask, and he had placed it over his face in obedience to their instructions. Then they had pulled out into the stream and headed straight for the vessel swinging at its anchors off the Battery. Plainly and tersely Mickey related how they had ascended the side of the ship, and descending into the cabin, had robbed the Briton of the diamond jewelry entrusted to his care. After that, descending to their boat again, Mickey and his companions had pulled off quite leisurely, until the police-barge had given chase; then he described how Dominick, the leader of the party, finding that the police-boat was gaining upon them, had deliberately leveled his revolver at the officers and fired, and further testified that he had heard a groan come from the police-boat and had seen one of the officers drop his oar and fall, evidently wounded by the pistol-shot of Dominick.

Mickey's evidence was direct and delivered without hesitation. It would have been much more likely to carry conviction if Shea had been a better looking man, but the contrast between the witness in the box, swearing a man's life away, and the prisoner at the bar, with the prospect of ten or twenty years in the State Prison before him, was great in fact.

Mickey Shea, a red-faced, bullet-headed fellow, with evil eyes, and the impress of the rough and shoulder-bitter stamped indelibly upon him, was just the opposite of George Dominick—Gentleman George—with his pale, delicate face and gentlemanly bearing; the contrast rendered still more marked by the unusual pallor of George's face, caused by the suffering and loss of blood entailed by his wound.

And near the prisoner, too, sat his wife, pale and evidently deeply agitated. This was a device of the astute Three-Decker, who, fully understood with effect the pale and anxious face of a pretty woman would have upon the tender susceptibilities of an average jurymen.

Mickey's evidence closed the first day's proceedings. Vainly Counselor Watt had pleaded that the case might be put off until Captain Drummond, the commander of the Golden Dragon, could be summoned from Europe to give his evidence in the case, but the Judge, rightly understanding it was for the purpose of gaining time alone that the motion had been made, quietly denied it, and decided that the trial must go on.

Just a single glance the Three-Decker cast around the court, but in the glance he fully expressed the opinion that there was no justice for his client in that court; then he sat down and gathered up his papers, apparently in deep despair. This was all done for effect, of course.

Among the spectators in the court-room was Nicholas Bruyn. It was not often that the ex-Judge troubled himself to attend a criminal trial unless he was personally concerned in it, but he felt a strange curiosity to see the desperado who had been honored with the friendship of the pretty Miss Desmond.

Bruyn was considerably astonished at the appearance of the prisoner, and what still more astonished him, as he got a good look at the pale and handsome face of Gentleman George, was the impression which took possession of him, that at some previous time he had seen a face which resembled the face of the man in the prisoner's dock with an almost life-long imprisonment staring him in the face.

The more Nicholas Bruyn looked at the prisoner the more he became convinced that somewhere he had seen the face before. And then the ex-Judge went back over his past life and tried to remember when and where he had met Gentleman George. But the effort was a failure, and Bruyn possessed a

wonderful memory, too—a fact that many a criminal had cause to remember when Nicholas Bruyn had sat in judgment.

"I am sure that I have met this fellow somewhere," the Judge muttered, impatiently, amazed that he could not "place" the face. "But where?—that is the rub. I wonder if he has ever been through my hands? It is not often that a face escapes me, and I am sure I have seen this one before; the eyes and hair, the peculiar shape of the face; oh, no! there is no mistake. I have met this youth once, but hang me if I can remember the circumstances."

Then the Judge suddenly remembered that during his political career he had been obliged for a brief period to associate with some very peculiar people, for politics, like misery, makes strange bed-fellows, and the thought occurred that, possibly at some caucus or primary election of the untried, he had encountered Gentleman George.

With this solution the Judge was fain to be satisfied. He remained throughout the trial, for he had taken quite an interest in the proceedings, and when he thought of Ellen Desmond, the actress, in connection with the man on trial for a deadly assault, he came quite quickly to the conclusion that it was as well that the handsome face and form of Gentleman George should adorn the corridors and workshops of Sing Sing Prison.

The Judge fully understood the interest that a face like George Dominick's would naturally excite in a susceptible female heart, and really was afraid that the society brigand would prove a dangerous rival should he choose to enter the lists and contest for the love of the pretty actress!

"The fellow is just what I was twenty-five or thirty years ago," the Judge thought, as he left the court-room, "and a woman is sometimes fool enough to prefer an adroit scoundrel with a handsome face and a plausible tongue to a man a little advanced in years, even if he has money at his back."

Bruyn went straight down to his office in Wall street. He was pretty deeply engaged in some large real-estate speculations, and still retained his office although he had almost given up legal practice.

Receiving his morning mail from the clerk, he passed into the inner office, his sanctum, and began to peruse his letters. He was interrupted, after ten or fifteen minutes, by the clerk, who informed him that a deputation of gentlemen wished to see him in the outer room.

Proceeding thither, Bruyn saw at a glance that his visitors were nearly all officers of the metropolitan police—that is, all that he knew of the party were. They were in plain clothes now, and evidently off duty.

"Good-day, Judge," said one of the gentlemen, who stood in advance of the rest, and had apparently been deputed to act as spokesman for the rest.

"Good-day, gentlemen," the Judge replied, with an inquiring glance as to their object, with an intent to ask the reason of their visit.

"Judge, you must excuse our calling upon you about a little legal business; but we thought that possibly we might get you to undertake our case, although we understood that you do not practice much at present. But, Judge, we're all of us from your district, and have backed you up good and strong when things were mighty close on election-day," said the spokesman of the party.

"I know that, gentlemen," the Judge replied. "I don't forget my friends; what do you want?"

"Mort Burke is dead—killed by George Dominick, and we want you to go in and help the District Attorney to swing this Gentleman George."

CHAPTER XXX.

GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY.

THE announcement of the death of the wounded policeman naturally created quite a deal of talk among those who had taken an interest in the trial of Gentleman George, and the interest created was not at all allayed when it was publicly reported that the eminent lawyer, Judge Bruyn, would give his services to the prosecution. Of course people naturally understood that the Judge had been retained by the friends of the murdered man, eager for justice upon the slayer.

Counselor Watt, the Three-Decker, seated in his office, within the shadows of the gloomy pile, known as the Tombs, gave a start of astonishment when he read the intelligence in a morning newspaper, that Nicholas Bruyn would assist the District Attorney in the trial of George Dominick.

The counselor was annoyed and disgusted. The case is bad enough as it is without having to fight half a dozen lawyers," he muttered, discontentedly.

The Three-Decker had met Judge Bruyn before, and feared his power over a jury. As well as any other living man who followed the law for a trade did the astute counselor know the weight of a plausible appeal to the twelve men, "good and true"—whom the newspapers generally playfully designate as the twelve idiots—within whose hands the fate of a prisoner rests.

Judge Bruyn's great power as a lawyer lay in his specious oratory. The death of the wounded man who had been stricken down in the discharge of his duty by the bullet of the river-thief, naturally made quite a difference in the manner of conducting the trial. The coroner's jury had first to return their verdict. The proceedings were hurried through with railroad-like rapidity, despite the efforts of Counselor Watt to retard the progress, and within a week George Dominick stood duly accused before the bar of justice with the murder of Mortimer Burke.

Then came the fight over the selection of a jury to try the case, in which the Three-Decker manfully contested the putting of any man on the jury who had ever read any newspaper account of the case, or who looked as if he possessed sense enough to keep himself out of the insane asylum. But all mortal things must have an end, and the jury was at last impaneled.

The counselor was not at all satisfied when the jury took their seats on the opening day of the trial, and he got a good look at them. It was a pretty fair-looking jury, as juries go, and the Three-Decker saw to his dismay that three or four men in the box really looked as if they possessed an average amount of common sense, and to the mind of the notorious criminal lawyer, common sense was a most dangerous thing to be possessed by a jurymen.

The jury in their seats, then came the tiresome details of the trial, tiresome to all, except the badgered witnesses, the cunning lawyers and the pale-face man who sat in the prisoner's box, on trial for his life.

Upon the prisoner's side the first witness produced was his wife, who testified that, on the night of the murder, her husband had accompanied her to her father's house, and had remained there until after twelve o'clock, and clearly stated that it was five minutes past twelve before they had left the house to go home to their own dwelling. Dominick's wife's father, Christopher Walebone, fully corroborated this statement, as also did his daughter, Penelope.

Now as Mickey Shea had positively sworn that he and the prisoner at the bar, George Dominick, had embarked from the foot of Market street, between eleven and half-past eleven, and had emphatically declared, in answer to a question from Counselor Watt, that he was positive that it was before half-past eleven that the River-Rats had started on their expedition, this rather weakened Shea's evidence. The object that the Three-Decker had in holding the witness so closely to the time that the embarkation had taken place, was not apparent until the following testimony was introduced; then it was perfectly plain that the object was to throw doubts upon the truth of Mr. Shea's statements. As to the wound in the shoulder, Mrs. Dominick testified that, on the morning after the night on which the policeman had been wounded, in carelessly handling her husband's revolver, it had exploded in her hand, and the ball had taken an erratic course across the room, clipped the post of the bed, and then had entered her husband's shoulder, he at the time being extended upon the bed.

Then the counselor brought up four doctors who had examined both the bed-post and the wound in Dominick's shoulder, and they fully testified that it was their belief that the wound could have been inflicted in such a manner. This strong testimony rather shook the evidence that had been given by two doctors, witnesses for the government, who had examined the wound in the prisoner's shoulder, and expressed their opinion that it had been inflicted by a spent ball, as described by Michael Shea, Esq.

And then the counselor paid his respects to the principal witness on the side of the prosecution. In a delicate way he drew out from him the damaging admission that he had been "up to the Island" three or four times, had also paid a visit to Sing-Sing, and even now was under heavy bonds to answer in an assault and battery case. Of course during the examination of Mr. Shea, there was an almost constant wrangle between the lawyers. One objected, and the other insisted, and a half-dozen times the Judge was obliged to interfere in order to restrain the ponderous counselor, and keep him within the bounds prescribed both by law and courtesy.

And the result was that the spectators witnessed one of those disgraceful scenes so common—unhappily—in our courts of justice, and if one of the spectators could have closed his eyes, with no great stretch of the imagination, he might easily have thought that he was listening to some bar-room brawl common to election time.

Then Judge Bruyn, calm, able and smiling, reviewed the case. He clearly showed how easily an *alibi* could be proven even in the most desperate cases. He did not attempt to attack the credibility of the witnesses for the prisoner, but simply related the history of an English case when a prisoner had established an *alibi* by witness for his swiftness as to his being in a certain place at a certain time, and how the prisoner had cunningly tampered with the clocks before the commission of the deed that he was accused of on purpose to prove an *alibi*, and so, on the evidence of innocent but deceived witnesses, he nearly escaped the punishment due to his outrage of the laws; and as to Mickey Shea, he simply described the man who had felt the power of the law, and, terrified by the weight of its iron hand, had tremblingly come forward to do one act of justice; had surrendered himself, bound hand and foot as it were, to answer for his misdeeds, and Judge Bruyn took it upon himself to declare that the Government had made no agreement with the witness whereby, in consequence of his evidence, he was to be shielded from punishment.

And then the Judge briefly reviewed the career of the prisoner at the bar as far as it was known to the police. A bank robber and confidence-man, always "wanted" and never captured; a man as able and skillful as he was wicked; a very Brigand of Society who preyed upon his fellow-men as ruthlessly as the foot-pad who beat his victim to the ground with a bludgeon or choked him *garote* fashion, while a companion went through his pockets.

When Judge Bruyn finished his speech and sat down, a little murmur of admiration ran through the court. Short, and apparently without effort as the speech was, it covered the ground thoroughly; each point was a fact planted in the dull brains of the wearied jury; no glittering generalities to dazzle and begot, but stubborn statements difficult to evade and impossible to answer.

Then the Judge delivered his charge to the jury; not a lengthy one but quite to the point, and in the prisoner's favor. The Three-Decker looked uneasily in his seat while he listened to it.

The Judge carefully drew attention to the witnesses who swore to the *alibi*, and then to the principal witness for the Government who swore so positively to the presence of the prisoner in the boat, and to his firing the shot which gave the policeman his death-wound. Although the Judge did not say so, in plain words, yet he inferred that the balance of proof was against the prisoner.

And the Judge, too, spoke of the Brigand of Society as being the most dangerous of his class, dangerous because he had brains as well as hands. Ugly words these for Gentleman George.

The jury retired to deliberate upon their verdict. George set his teeth firmly together; the warm rays of the afternoon sun that stole in through the curtained window, and played at hide and seek upon the uncarpeted floor, seemed to mock him with their bright, gladsome beams. They revealed to his mind the contrast between a life of freedom and the prison-cell, or worse still, the dark embraces of a felon's grave.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

MISS DESMOND, idly reclining in a rocking-chair in her little parlor, was perusing the afternoon paper. She had just finished the account of the trial of Gentleman George.

"I wonder what the verdict will be," she murmured, and as she spoke, her smooth, white brow was furrowed over by the lines of thought. "Will they hang him?" A half-hidden shudder came over the slender form at the thought. "That would be dreadful, and yet he deserves it. How strange that he and Judge Bruyn should come in contact! What an excellent speech the Judge made, too. He knows that I called upon George in the Tombs. I am sure of it, or else he would not have questioned me regarding him."

Then for quite a long time the woman was silent, deep in thought. Her meditations were not altogether pleasant judging by the expression upon her face.

"I fairly made my blood run cold the other day when the Judge questioned me about George. I think I succeeded in baffling him, though, keen and skillful as he is," she exclaimed, abruptly. "Suppose by any chance that this haughty millionaire should discover my secret? Ah! good-by then to my scheme." And with the thought the actress sprung to her

feet and paced up and down the room, her lips pressed firmly together and her little white hands clenched.

"I don't want them to hang George, badly as he deceived me, but I do wish that they would send him somewhere so that he will not trouble me."

Miss Desmond paused by the window and gazed out upon crowded Broadway.

"Gentleman George in the State Prison and the wife of Nicholas Bruyn," she murmured, thoughtfully. "Oh! what a glorious vengeance that would be! What a recompense for the wrongs of the past and the many pangs of pain that I have suffered in these long and weary years! And to have this man of ice—this cold-hearted, treacherous Bruyn at my feet; to see him kneel in humble adoration, when, if he only knew who and what I am, he would spurn me from him with contempt and loathing. How many in this life could play as bold a part as I do now!"

Scornfully and with arrogance in voice and face the actress put the question.

The abrupt entrance of the negress, Juno, interrupted Miss Desmond's meditation.

"What is it, Juno?" the actress demanded, understanding at once from the manner of the negress that she bore a message.

"Dar's a gemmen down-stairs dat wants to see you, Missy."

"Turn him away at once!" Miss Desmond exclaimed, resuming her seat in the rocking-chair as she spoke, and picking up the newspaper which she had dropped.

"Yes, Missy, I know what you allers tote me fur to do, but dis yere gemmen ain't like the rest of 'em," the negress said, slowly.

"Oh, they are all alike!" the actress exclaimed, impatiently. "I am not at home to any one. You must remember and not allow any person to persuade you to the contrary."

"But dis yere gemmen ain't none of yere common trash," the negro woman protested; "he's a real gemmen for sure, an' says dat he wants fur to see you on 'ficular business.'"

"That is what they all say," Miss Desmond replied, quite enraged that any stranger should be able to produce such an impression upon her vigilant janitor. "What is that you have there?" she continued, noticing something white in the hand of the negress; "is it the gentleman's card?"

"Yes, Missy."

The actress took the card from the extended hand. A single line of print only on the smooth white surface.

The name, Neil Jemmission.

Just a moment Miss Desmond looked at the card, and then with an expression of rage upon her face, she crumpled it up fiercely in her hand and threw it away.

"Tell him that I am not at home to any one!" she exclaimed, quickly and imperiously, "and if he will not take no for an answer, show him the door and put him out by main force, if he refuses to go. I suppose that you are too stupid to do that."

"Iunno, Missy," the negress said, shaking her head in a dubious manner. "Dis yere gemman ain't one of dat kind dat you kin sling 'righ de door. He ain't one of 'em starched young fellas wid' posesy in dere button-hole. I'll tell him dat you ain't home; dat's de way I'll fix it."

Juno then withdrew, leaving Miss Desmond in a very peculiar state of mind.

The negress descended at once to the front door where she had left the gentleman who desired to see Miss Desmond on particular business, and whose card bore the name of Neil Jemmission.

"The negro woman had left the gentleman standing outside the door, but on her return, she found that he had taken advantage of her absence to come inside and had also closed the door after him."

It was the "doctor" in person who waited for audience with the charming young actress. As the negress descended the stairs and discovered that the gentleman was in the hall and had closed the door behind him, she shook her head gravely. She began to have an idea that she had a troublesome task in hand.

"I've done gone, and seen, sar, an' she ain't home," Juno said.

"Ah, did you give her my card and tell her that I wished to see her on very particular business?" Jemmission asked, entirely ignoring what the negress had said.

Juno stared in surprise.

"Deed, sar, I done tote you dat she ain't at home for sure," she said, earnestly.

"Oh, yes, I understand all about that," Jemmission replied, in the most careless manner possible; "you are to tell me that she is not at home. The lady thought that was the easiest and best way to get rid of me."

"Deed, sar, it was de blessed truth!" declared the negress, stoutly.

"You are quite a valuable janitor, you lie with a coolness that is perfectly refreshing."

"No, sar, I ain't done tote no lie!" exclaimed now, indignantly. "I tote you dat de lady isn't at home."

"And when will she be at home?" demanded Jemmission, abruptly.

Juno hesitated; she had not been instructed by her mistress upon this point.

"Will she be at home this afternoon?" Jemmission asked, finding that the negress hesitated.

"I don't know, sar."

"She would come home sometime, I suppose?"

"Yas, sar—I 'spose so," Juno replied, very slowly.

"Well, I will wait until she does come home," and Jemmission smiled, serenely, in the face of the woman.

"No, sar!" cried the negress, enraged, "you can't wait yer, white man! You jes' go out of dat door now!"

"And if I don't accept your polite invitation and go out?" Jemmission asked, smiling in a manner that both enraged and awed the woman.

"Fore de lord, I'll put you out for sure!" Juno cried, advancing in menace.

"Do you know what I'll do if you try that sort of proceeding upon me?" Jemmission asked, his face as smiling as ever, but a dangerous light shining in his dark eyes.

"You gwine out, dat's all," retorted Juno, irresolutely.

"I shall forget the respect due to your sex, take you by the nap of the neck and fling you out into the street," and as he spoke, Jemmission advanced a step toward the negress.

Juno retreated in alarm. The cool, determined, snarl of the man frightened her; he seemed, she felt pretty well convinced from his looks that he was able to accomplish the feat of ejecting her from her own threshold. As she had informed her mistress, it was no dandy young man this time.

"Look out, white man! don't you dar' to put your han' on me!" Juno cried, threateningly, retreating to the first stair as she spoke.

"I know your mistress is at home, for I saw her at the window from the other side of the street, not ten minutes ago," Jemmission said; "and I'll swear that she has not left the house since then. Now go up-stairs, tell your mistress that the gentleman will not go away; that he wishes to see her on particular business, and that he will not leave the house until he does see her."

"She won't see you, anyhow," Juno muttered. "Just you tell her what I say!" Jemmission said, sternly. "And if there is any more talk of putting me out by force, you just tell her that the probable result of such a course will be that we will all fetch up in the station-house, and I don't think that will annoy me as much as it will her."

Juno departed to bear the message.
(To be continued—commenced in No. 194.)

WOLFGANG,

The Robber of the Rhine:

THE YOUNG KNIGHT OF THE CROSSIGORDE.

BY CAPT. FREDK. WHITTAKER.

AUTHOR OF "NADIA, THE RUSSIAN SPY," "THE RED RAJAH," "THE SEA CAT," "THE ROCK RIDER," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER VII.

SIR WOLFGANG'S MISTAKE.

FATHER FRANCIS entered the hall softly, and approached his grim jailer. Sir Wolfgang turned round to him with a quiet and natural look and voice, but with a slight tone of vexation.

"Father Francis," he said, "what stuff is this that you have been telling my men here?" "I do not know," said the friar, calmly; "I have told them many things. What do you mean?"

"I mean this about red-hot pitchforks, devils, and so on," said the knight, sternly; "Peter the Killer was the most desperate fellow in my band, and you have got him frightened so that he is afraid to die."

The monk smiled gravely and sweetly.

"There are many steps on the ladder to heaven," he said, quietly, and without a sign of fear; "the sinner must be convinced of his sins before he can long for pardon."

Sir Wolfgang gave a bitter laugh.

"Bah," he said, contemptuously; "monks' lies to fool the people. How do you know anything about hell? Were you ever there?" "No," said the friar, quietly; "but I believe My Master's word. So the devils do, and they tremble."

"Do I?" asked Sir Wolfgang, fiercely starting up and confronting the friar. Father Francis faced him boldly and quietly.

In the still watches of the night," he said, softly, "when the castle is all still save for the scampering mice, did you never start, and think some one you had wronged was near you?"

Sir Wolfgang fell back into his chair, and regarded the other with a startled look.

"How do you know that?" he asked in a low voice, but with a tigerish gleam in his eye.

"I know nothing," said the friar; "nothing but my Master's word. One message has reached you to-day. He sends you a second. It is a question."

"What is it?" asked the castellan, his voice shaking ever so little in spite of his firmness, at the quiet, impressive manner of the priest.

"It is this," said the friar, and he raised his hand and pointed upward to heaven, and then downward.

"Had Zimri peace who slew his master?"

Sir Wolfgang, for perhaps the first time, turned deadly pale. The next moment he sprang up and hurled himself on the helpless priest with a low, savage oath.

"Thou liest," he hissed between his teeth, as he choked the other against the wall; "no man saw me do it, and thou shalt follow him. I'll teach thee to sow dissension in my flock, intermeddling priest, and turn my bulgies into cowards."

And he compressed his terrible grip on the friar's throat till the latter was black in the face and nearly dead. Then he dashed the offensive man on the floor of the dais with a great crash and turned away triumphantly, muttering to himself.

"I've settled him, at all events."

He started to behold close to him the figure of Bertha von Falkenstein, marble pale, with dilated eyes. The poor priest lay on the ground, the blood flowing from a deep cut on the side of his head where he had struck on the stone pavement, to all appearance dying. Bertha was transformed in looks. The timid girl, shrinking from her guardian's brutality, had changed, for the moment, into an avenging goddess, white, fearless, and wonderfully beautiful.

She marched straight on Sir Wolfgang, her little hand raised, and pointing with intense scorn and anger at his face.

"Coward," she cried, her clear, shrill tones ringing through the empty hall, and out of the open windows; "coward and false knight, to strike down the helpless man of God! Too long have we borne with thee and thy wicked deeds, Wolfgang the traitor! I have submitted to thy tyranny till the time has past to bear it! I will call on the emperor for help to clear my heritage of thee, that has stolen it. I will go forth from here, and beg my way to him, and stop me if you dare. You have killed the only good creature in this wicked place and God will punish you for it. The best, the kindest man! Oh, father Francis! Good father! What shall I do without you?"

Her sudden tempest of indignation ended in a wild burst of weeping, as she sunk down and wept on him, and stood perfectly dumb. There was a rushing of feet in the hall; and a crowd of retainers, attracted by the unusual tones of poor Bertha's voice, came running in to see what was the matter. When they saw it there was a subdued murmur of sympathy and anger among them. Wild and wicked as were the crew in that castle, there was hardly one but had experienced some kindness at the hands of Bertha or the friar, or some brutality at that of Sir Wolfgang. The latter had actually recoiled from his little enemy when she advanced on him, and stood perfectly dumb. The swift flow of a woman's indignant eloquence had, for the first time, descended on Sir Wolfgang, and the change astounded him. He knew that every man in the castle knew his story, and whose rights he had usurped; and since the message from Sir Adelbert, a sudden desire to ingratiate himself with his men, and attach them to him had seized him. He felt that he might possibly need all his friends ere long. He strove to propitiate Bertha before the rest, saying:

"Don't cry, child. He is not hurt much. The false monk made me angry. He told me a lie, and wanted me to punish you for a fault he said you had committed."

"It is false," cried Bertha, quivering with anger, and not insensible to her safety in the crowd of spectators perhaps; "he asked you only, Had Zimri peace who slew his master?"

At this question, coming a second time before so many, the castellan turned pale and raised his clenched hand, as if to strike the kneeling girl.

A general roar of anger from behind warned him to desist. He turned furiously round, and met lowering faces from every man in the hall.

He quailed before the storm he had raised, and tried to turn it off with a laugh.

"You're too hasty, girl," he said, roughly;

"I never meant to hurt him," 'Twas only a jest. See, he revives."

In fact, father Francis at this juncture did revive and struggle up into a sitting posture, when he leaned his head on his knees and groaned. The castellan saw that he had made a great mistake in his passion. He tried to remedy it the best way he knew.

"I'm sorry to hurt thee, father," he said, awkwardly. "I will send a flagon of good wine to your cell, and you shall be well nursed by lady Bertha. Come, girl, help him away, and you can go where you please, all over the castle. I can't say more than that I'm sorry, can I?"

Father Francis rose feebly and stood, with Bertha supporting him, looking at the knight.

"I think you are, my lord," he said, quietly. "Come, my child, let us go."

And without another word he tottered from the room, while a low murmur of sympathy rose up from the crowd outside. Sir Wolfgang turned angrily round and faced them all.

"What are you groaning about, fellows?" he said, sulkily. "Did you never see a broken head before? Get out from here into the castle yard and stables where ye belong. Out, I say!"

The retainers slowly and sullenly dispersed, and Sir Wolfgang returned to his great chair, and brooded over the news he had received.

"They must die," he muttered; "they know too much, both of them. Who would have thought the little creeping cat had got so much spirit? She looked so much like her mother then. Send to the emperor? She'll find it hard to get there, unless she can fly from the battlements, for all the air she takes shall be there henceforth."

He sat brooding for some time thus, when Red Max entered the hall and approached him.

"What is it, Max?" he asked, peacefully enough now.

"The baron of Ritterschloss has sent you a letter," said Red Max; "here it is."

"Where's the messenger?" demanded the castellan, taking the letter, which, however, he did not open.

"He's in the court," said Max, "along with a herald."

"Send the herald here," said Sir Wolfgang; "he can read."

Not a man in the castle, except father Francis, could.

The herald soon entered the hall in his green tabard, with the arms of Ritterschloss in gold on the breast.

"Canst read, herald?" demanded Erstein.

"If so, read this. My clerk is sick to-day."

The herald took the folded parchment and read the letter thus:

To the Baron Wolfgang von Erstein, greeting:

"Dear cousin and comrade, we send you herewith the news of the most gentle and joyous tournament that ever was or will be. The emperor, whom we all thought was going to come down on us and stop our privileges on the Rhine, has turned out to be a good comrade. He has proclaimed a great tilt and tournament at the city of Nuremberg to honor his installation as emperor of the Holy Crosscode. He and his knights will await all comers there, for three days from the last of July, and maintain the lists if they can. I am going, and so is all of our league. We depend on you to tilt against these Crosscoders. They are said to be good knights, and the emperor is Grand Master of the order. Send word if you will come."

"Yours in the league, Ritterschloss."

"I will be there," said Sir Wolfgang, joyfully. "Tell the baron that I will join him before Nuremberg, and that we will take every lance upon the Rhinebank, if we can get them together in time. I shall have one good eye by that time, and I may meet him."

The herald departed, well pleased with a liberal garden from the robber-knight, and Sir Wolfgang went to his chamber to sleep, since he could not hunt or fight till his wound was well.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MIDNIGHT MARRIAGE.

FATHER FRANCIS lay on his pallet in his little cell, and Bertha watched beside him. The poor friar suffered intense pain in his head, and the young lady was the only creature in the castle that attended him. The men below, who were not so ready to help his victim, where help involved trouble.

It was night, and the cell was illumined by the light of a small swinging lamp, which shone out of a low door on the stone balcony outside, that overlooked the river. Father Francis' cell was in a remote tower, known as the Falcon's tower, built on the summit of the rock where a pair of peregrine falcons had once made their eyrie. It was far from the donjon-keep where the great hall was, and only communicated with the rest of the castle over the battlements of the curtain. Bertha occupied the whole of the lower part of this tower, her sole privilege being that of quiet possession of those rooms. Sir Wolfgang never made his appearance in that part of the castle for some reason or other.

The lowest windows all looked out on a sheer precipice, about two hundred feet deep, and the idea of escape on that side was regarded as ridiculous. No one without wings or help could have got down.

In the middle story was father Francis' cell, and here sat Bertha by the pale lamp reading aloud from a breviary to the wounded priest.

"Oh! father," she said at last, laying down the book; "it seems as if our only comfort now was in reading these holy words of the church. Does not your head feel better, now?"

"A little, child," he answered, faintly. "Give me to drink, daughter, if you please."

Bertha handed him a cup of water, and he drank with feverish avidity. Just as she was replacing the cup, a sharp tick came on the lintel of the outer door, and down dropped an arrow, with several chips of stone, on the floor of the cell.

Bertha started, and so did father Francis. But the strange part of it was, that the girl did not scream, but blushed instead, deep crimson.

"I knew he would come," she murmured, softly, as she looked at the arrow on the floor. A spiral strip of white parchment seemed to be wound around it from heel to point.

"Who—who has come?" asked the friar, nervously.

"Sir Adelbert," she answered, her whole face glowing. "I knew it was he. Max Stoffer has told him of my tower, and he is below to rescue me."

"How can that be, daughter?" said the priest, wonderingly; "no human being could climb up the face of that rock."

"There is a legend," said Bertha, gayly, taking up the arrow and unrolling the parchment as she spoke. "That once on a time this castle had a captive princess, and that the first Rudolph von Falkenstein climbed from below to the falcon's nest, and shot up an arrow to the lady's window— it is he! It is he!" she broke off wildly, kissing the precious letter. "We shall be free, yet."

She held the parchment to the lamp. It was a long, slender strip written in red ink. She read aloud:

"LADY BERTHA VON FALKENSTEIN—The emperor has heard of your wrongs, and has sent me to avenge them. Look from the lower window."

ADIELBERT.

"Good-by, father," said the girl, gayly; "I will tell you all about it when I come back."

"But, daughter," objected the priest, urged by his conscience, "your spiritual adviser ought to be present at your interview with a strange youth."

"Oh, father," she said, coaxingly, "remember your poor head. It is not safe for you to move about. Besides, he can not get in, you know."

"The first Rudolph von Falkenstein got in, did he not?" said the priest, dryly, "and carried off the princess?"

"Yes, father," she admitted with a burning blush; "but then he brought up a rope-ladder, and Sir Adelbert would not do any thing like that, you know. Oh, father, don't try to move. You'll hurt your poor head. If he comes in I'll bring him up. Indeed I will. And your health is the first thing, you know, father."

The priest smiled faintly.

"Go, my daughter," he said; "I will trust the honor of the castle with you. Go, and return quickly."

Bertha was out of the room like a flash. Brought up in perfect innocence by the friar, as she had been, she could not account to herself for her anxiety to hold this same interview without witnesses.

She only knew that she had never seen any one half as handsome as Sir Adelbert, and that he had come as he had promised.

She hurried down the winding stone steps with nervous haste, ran to the lower window and looked out. This window, like the rest, was down to the floor, and had a stone balcony outside, from which Bertha leaned, the rising moon shining full on her beautiful head. She gazed eagerly down the precipice.

It was yet in deep shadow from the opposite mountains, but the light was slowly creeping down its rugged face, lighting up the crannies.

The foundations of the tower were cut out of the living rock, and not more than thirty feet below there was a projecting ledge that jutted out from the precipice just like a bracket or console, the famous platform of the old falcon's nest, now long deserted.

As Bertha leaned over, a voice came up to her out of the darkness, a well remembered voice.

"Sit!" it said; "Lady Bertha, is that you?"

"Yes, my lord," she almost whispered back. "Be careful for the love of heaven, sir knight. Do not fall."

"Fear not," answered the voice of Sir Adelbert; "I am safe here. I came up by Sir Rudolph's ladder, and my faith, 'tis a perilous road in the dark, but I shall go back safe enough."

"But you will be discovered," said Bertha, alarmed.

"Fear not," he answered again. "The hall of the donjon is full of revelers, and by this time they are all well drunk. Besides, we are out of sight of all parts of the castle, save only this tower."

"Oh! sir knight," said Bertha, softly; "how glad I am that you came at last."

"I have come to rescue you, sweet lady," said the voice below; "and if you will follow my directions, you shall see the means of safety left with you this night. Are you alone in the tower?"

"Only father Francis is here," she answered; "my good confessor. He is up-stairs, hurt sorely by the brutal knight of the castle."

"I will see him," said Sir Adelbert, promptly. "Max, send up the cord."

And here as the moonlight gradually reached the falcon's nest, Bertha saw a dark figure close to that of the knight, while below both rushed the dark river just above the rapids.

The second man was short and broad, and the girl saw him bend a bow and fit it to an arrow. He gently shot up this arrow so that it fell into the little balcony beside her, and Bertha perceived a round ball tied on the point. It proved to be a ball of string.

"Unwind the string," said Sir Adelbert, in a low tone; "drop the end over."

Bertha obeyed with alacrity. The romance and excitement of an escape were begun already. Sir Adelbert fastened a heavier cord to the string and bade her draw up. At the end of the string was a strong hook.

"Place the hook over the balustrade," said the knight; and in a moment more he was climbing rapidly up to the window.

Now Bertha fluttered and trembled as the active figure vaulted into the balcony, and dropped on one knee at her feet.

"Sweet lady," said Sir Adelbert; "here in the face of heaven and the eternal stars hear me swear never to rest till Falkenstein has regained its true mistress, and Adelbert is admitted as her knight. Tell me, Lady Bertha, dearest, sweetest, and best, shall the second who has climbed to the falcon's nest have the luck of the first Rudolph, or have I climbed in vain?"

"Poor little Bertha fluttered and trembled with some strange feeling, and yet smiled all the while."

"I—I don't understand—" she faltered, "what you mean?"

"Which was true. The child did not understand herself and her own feelings, much less another's."

"I mean that I love you," said the soft, deep voice of Sir Adelbert; "that I loved you from the moment I saw you at the lattice. Will Lady Bertha take me for her knight, to fight for her against all the world?"

"Oh! Sir Adelbert! How can you ask?" sighed the poor child, in a tone of almost painful delight. "You are so good, so noble, so brave. Can you love, indeed, a poor little deserted maid like me?"

"The violet hides among the leaves, and the skylark soars to the sun," said Sir Adelbert; "but the free bird comes back to the modest flower, and loves it better than the gaudy dandelion. I am thy knight, Bertha, is't not so?"

"Oh! yes, my lord," she said, faintly.

"All me not my lord," said Sir Adelbert, still kneeling at her feet. "Think only and I am the princess in prison, and I am Rudolph come to save you. Call me Rudolph, nay, if you will, dear Rudolph."

He knelt there in the full light of the moon, and she stood before him. Neither touched the other, so much as with the tips of the fingers, but gazed into each other's eyes. Both his hands were clasped together, and hers were up, half hiding her beaming face. Shy, proud, delicate, and yet tender and loving, this virgin soul was not frightened by so much as a look of passion from this knight of courtesy. He knelt as he might at a shrine. She stood, full of sweet shame and delicious fears, vague and formless, at being thus adored. She did not hear the soft step of father Francis, who had heard the sound of voices, and stolen down stairs, full of fears for his innocent charge. The good friar stood in the shadow of the door, a silent and interested spectator of the whole scene.

"Rudolph! ah! dear Rudolph!" sobbed Bertha, and burst into tears, she knew not why. Still the knight did not offer to approach her. He rose to his feet and said, quietly:

"It is enough, sweet lady. Henceforth I am Rudolph to you, and you are my princess forever and ever. Where is the good father Francis?"

The friar stepped forward out of the shadow.

"He is here, sir knight," he said, in a tone of deep feeling; "he has seen what he feared never to see again, a true knight, whose love is as pure as his own brave heart. Kneel down, sir knight, that I may bless thee."

Sir Adelbert bowed his lofty head before the barefooted friar, with the same simplicity that distinguished his every movement.

"May the blessing of God be on thee, sir knight," said the friar, lifting trembling hands. "May he give thee thy heart's desire, and send us more knights like thee, with the cross of Christ in their hearts, and the courage of the true knight to fight for that cross forever."

"AMEN!" said Sir Adelbert, in so deep and fervent a tone that the priest started. "The cross in the heart, the heart under the cross, God send it success!"

Then he rose to his feet and turned to Bertha. For the first time he took her by the hand. The deep solemnity of the priest's address had awed the young girl into forgetfulness of her emotions before. Sir Adelbert addressed her with earnest gravity now, without abating the melodious softness of voice and manner he had been using.

"Bertha," he said, "before God and his priest, I ask thee to wed me to-night, that I may be able to take thee from here without so much as a speck on that fair fame of thine. Lady Bertha, will you wed me?"

"Yes, Rudolph," she answered, gently; "you know I will."

"Father Francis," said the knight, turning to him, "will you wed two lovers who wish to be one forever?"

"Right gladly," said the father, heartily. "Kneel down, my children, and not all the power of the empire can sunder you when I shall have spoken the words."

And then, in the dark turret chamber above the Falcon's Nest, where the first Rudolph of Falkenstein won his bride, the knight and the lady were made one by the priest of God.

Then, for the first time, Sir Adelbert folded his bride in his arms, and Bertha thrilled to the first kiss her innocent lips had ever received since her old nurse had died, ten years before.

"And now, father," said Sir Adelbert, gravely, "I am about to commit my wife to your charge for a few days. I shall leave you both the means of escape when I go, and I shall return every night at the same hour. I have men within this castle who keep me informed of all that goes on, or I should not leave you thus. If any danger comes toward you, I shall know of it, and be there to avert it from you, but for the present all I have to say is, keep in the tower and do not descend to the donjon save for food."

"There is no need, my lord," said the friar. "It has been the custom of Sir Wolfgang to send all food hidden from the buttery three times a day. He has not dared to let the lady Bertha be seen at all hours in the donjon hall. There are too many of the old Falkenstein retainers left among his crew of thieves. He has tried all arts short of force to keep us hidden here."

"Good!" said the knight. "Obey him then for the present. The time will come soon when Wolfgang shall be hung on the very oak trees he has stolen. But till then we must be cautious. My Bertha! Dost thou think I'd dare to have me leave thee thus, my new-wed bride, and yet not murmur?"

He folded her in his arms, and looked down with loving tenderness on the trembling girl.

"Whatever you say, my lord, that will I do," she answered, bravely. "You are wise, and know best."

He kissed her brow gently.

"That's my brave Bertha," he said; "and now listen. I am going to leave thee to-night, little bride. But I will show thee how to escape if so be that need comes. From the Falcon's Nest to the ground is a ladder of wire, so fine that it can not be seen, strong enough to hold twenty men. Keep the rope that I came up by, and hide it in your room here. If need be, let yourself down to the Falcon's Nest, and thence you will find the way easy to the little shore of pebbles under the cliff. They think here that the river below is impassable, but you will find that it is not. Under a rock you will find a little boat, invisible from above, and nobody ever goes down to the water's edge here. The beach is speckled with only a little bay as it were, sheltered by jutting rocks. The boat runs on a rope all across the river. Pull on the rope and you will go across easily, and be in the woods on the other side. Then cast loose the rope, abandon the boat, and follow the first path, you see before you. It will lead you to friends who will protect you."

Bertha listened attentively.

"Is that all, my lord?" she asked, timidly. "Will you go, and not even tell your wife your real name?"

Sir Adelbert paused.

"Bertha," he said, gravely, "do you mistrust me? Can you not leave me to tell that at the proper moment?"

He looked at her sadly. She hid her face in his bosom, and faltered:

"Yes, my lord—but I ought to know—it is not right that I should not know who my husband is."

"Listen, Bertha," he said; "I have a reason for not telling that name here and yet. But to the good father I will whisper it, under the seal of the holy church. To know it now, before the end would be to make thee miserable. But in good time thou shalt. Will not my princess trust her Rudolph?"

"Well then, whisper it to father Francis," said Bertha, putting a little, "since you won't trust me to keep the secret."

"I will," said Sir Adelbert, smiling; "and father Francis, who has doubtless read of it in his old studies, shall tell you the story of the Princess Psyche who feared to trust her husband long ago, and who paid for it dearly. Father Francis, come hither."

And the tall knight bent down and whispered a few words in the friar's ear. Father Francis gave a slight start and surveyed the other with astonishment.

"My lord," he said, respectfully, "your commands shall be obeyed. I will watch over the lady Bertha unceasingly."

Sir Adelbert turned and folded his young wife in his arms, kissing her fondly.

"Farewell, sweet heart," he said; "remember that I am near thee always. Think of me, and love me, Bertha sweet. And trust thy Rudolph, princess mine."

She clung to him weeping a moment. The next he had vaulted out of the window and was descending the rope rapidly to the Falcon's Nest.

He kissed his hand in farewell from thence, and Bertha watched the two figures descending the precipice by the invisible ladder to the stream below.

CHAPTER IX.

THE KNIGHTS OF THE CROSSCODE.

THE city of Nuremberg was crowded with people from all parts of Germany, to celebrate the grand tournament in honor of the Knights of the Crosscode, proclaimed by the emperor, Rudolph of Hapsburg.

The long interregnum of blood which had brooded over Germany for nineteen years, since the death of the good emperor Conrad IV., was ended at last, and the Count of Hapsburg had been unanimously elected emperor, a year before.

But, during the interregnum, disorder had risen to a vast height in the once happy empire. Nowhere had rapine and license come out so boldly and wickedly as among the Robber Knights of the Rhine, and the emperor had been powerless to effect any thing against their formidable league.

Apparently he had given up the attempt in despair, for to this tournament he had sent special invitations among all the knights of the empire, without distinction, and the men of the Rhine League were among the first to come to the city of Nuremberg.

It was the morning of the tournament. At least a thousand barons, margraves, dukes and princes were assembled at Nuremberg, or encamped around the walls in the meadows.

The order of the Holy Crosscode was to be instituted by the emperor, and every one wanted to know what this Crosscode was, and who were the knights. At present all was a mystery, but the church of St. Lawrence had been appointed for the installation, and the Knights of the Crosscode were to tilt against all comers afterward.

Of other knights there was an immense crowd, and at least twenty thousand men at arms encamped in the meadows outside.

The knight of Erstein, with a black patch hiding his sightless left eye, now nearly healed, had come to the town as he had promised, with his train of spears, and along with his neighbor Ritterschloss.

All the knights of the Rhine League were encamped near each other, and around them were the knights of Bohemia, Franconia, Austria and others, who were closely attached to the new emperor.

At last, at ten in the forenoon, the bells clanged out merrily on the summer air, and the nobles began to stream toward the great church of St. Lawrence.

The people were compelled to stand outside, for the building would not hold such a crowd, and they formed a great lane to the door of the church, and watched the nobles enter.

All were magnificently dressed, and most were armed, ready for the tournament. A great eagerness was felt to see the vaunted Knights of the Crosscode, and many a fierce rival had taken his oath to overthrow them or die in the attempt.

So they stalked with a great clash into the church, and waited, standing on the stone pavement, for the coming of the procession. There were no seats. Every one stood.

At last the great organ in the choir burst forth into a triumphant flood of sound, and the priests and acolytes entered, chanting the *In Troit*.

There was a great hush in the church, every one straining their necks to see what came next. Then there was a glitter and clash of steel, and a file of armed figures emerged from the vestry door, and advanced to the center of the chancel, where they stood in front of the altar, with their backs to the people.

There were just thirteen figures all told, their armor exactly alike, and bright like silver. Every visor was down, and they wore no surcoats, so that there was nothing to indicate which was which. They stood in a line, the central knight towering several inches above his companions, and bearing in his right hand a folded banner, his only mark of distinction. Not one wore any offensive weapon yet, but a heap of swords lay in front of the altar.

The hush of suspense in the congregation was almost painful, as these mysterious figures, with closed visors, stalked solemnly out to the front of the altar. The swell of the organ slowly subsided, the song died softly away, and the voice of the Bishop of Nuremberg was heard chanting the *Orate, fratres*.

The whole assembly sunk down on their knees, while the bishop uttered a long prayer in Latin for the new knights of the Crosscode, and the mass was duly chanted and sung. Then came the grand ceremony of the installation.

The folded banner was unrolled for the first time, and the tall knight in white armor waved it in full sight of the congregation, whom he addressed with a loud, hollow voice, that rung through the bars of the closed visor like one from the grave.

"Men of Germany," he said, "knights and barons! behold the banner of the Crosscode! It is first unfolded in the house of God. Pray that it may float in the breeze of battle till every false knight is laid low, and every knight honors his vow as in the days of our fathers!"

A deep "AMEN!" came from the six silent figures on either side, loud, hollow, and sepulchral.

The curious nobles looked at the banner and then at one another. It bore in the middle, on a simple white field, a crimson heart, on which was graven a golden cross, and around the heart ran the Latin motto: "*Crux in Corde*" (the cross in the heart). That was all.

"What does it mean?" said one to the other. "The cross in the heart? What mummery is this?"

But now the bishop advanced, and took the banner in his hand, while he audibly repeated, in German:

"Blessed be the banner of the Crosscode, with all the blessings the Church can bestow on it! May it shine in the van of the army of truth and justice, and wave over the grave of oppression and robbery. The holy Church blesses it, and calls on her knights to defend it."

Immediately the whole group of knights, as if at a signal, rushed into a circle around the bishop, who held it up.

"Call us, father," echoed the deep murmur from between the bars of the helmets.

The bishop called out in a loud voice:

"Rudolph of Hapsburg, Emperor of Germany, take thou the banner of the Crosscode, and be thou Grand Master!"

The tall knight who had unrolled the banner, sprung up, amid a tempest of shouts from the congregation, who began to realize who he was.

"Hoch! Hoch!" they shouted: "*Hoch lebe der Kaiser!*"

The emperor, for it was himself, waved the banner in the air and pronounced, after the bishop, the oath:

"I, Rudolph of Hapsburg, Emperor of Germany, and Grand Master of the Crosscode, accept the trust of the banner as from God. I swear before HIS high altar to keep the cross in my heart, my heart under the cross, to fight against all oppressors, and to rest not from the struggle till the poorest man in Germany can walk alone, unarmed, from the North Sea to the Alps, with none to make him afraid. I swear to hold my word sacred as an oath, to respect all women in memory of Christ's Mother; to defend the cause of the fatherless and oppressed; to be courteous to high and low alike, and to fight manfully for the holy Crosscode while life lasts."

He knelt before the bishop, who blessed him. Then he rose to his feet and summoned by name his fellow knights.

"Karl, Margrave of Wurtemberg; Franz,

Duke of Bohemia; Friedrich, of Franconia; Max of Bavaria; Ludwig, of Baden; Heinrich, of Cassel; Moritz, of Saxony; Wilhelm, of Brandenburg; Rudolph, of Swabia; Conrad, of Austria; George, of Hungary; Andreas, of Tyrol, come to the defense of the banner."

Each knight, as his name was called, stood up and laid a hand on the banner-staff which was closed in a circle of steel. As if with one voice the twelve knights of the Crosscode pronounced the oath:

"We swear to defend the holy Crosscode, Cross in Heart, Heart under Cross, we swear to fight to the death, to honor our word as an oath, to respect all women, for the sake of Christ's Mother; to love only one and to keep to her only. God bless the Crosscode."

Then each knight sprang to the foot of the altar, caught up a sword, and in a moment more twelve bright blades flashed around the banner.

"In the name of God and the Holy Virgin!" cried the deep voice of the emperor, "the Crosscode is displayed! Death to all false knights!"

Wynder having tightly bound both his limbs and his hands by this time, they compelled him to sit upright on the lounge. "You'll find her asleep, gentlemen. Take her away if you will. I confess to my part in the scheme—how it was rather cruel, wasn't it? But how could I help it?—I only obeyed orders to save my carcass from destruction. I am glad you are going to relieve me of the care of her. By Satan! I am more than glad—I rejoice! Take her at once."

"Tell me—ruffian!" said Varian Crosier, picking up and donning the hat and cape which Thaddeus had appropriated, "is there any thing to eat in this outlandish place?"

"And to drink?" supplemented Wynder. "Hanged if I'm not almost famished! I feel somewhat chilly, too. These wet clothes. Captain—I told you I'd have an ague. Key, you beast!"—to Thaddeus, "is there food and drink around here anywhere?"

"Ay, plenty of both, gentlemen," replied the stabler, still whitening, still affecting an overabundance of dread. "In that cupboard you will find wine and bread, and sweetmeats—they were brought there yesterday for Elise De Martine, who, I swear, is on the other side of the iron door, and who, I also swear, I am glad to know—you are going to release. She is more beautiful than when she was only seventeen years old, which was ten years ago. There's the food, gentlemen—help yourselves; you will find it very choice—" and within himself: "By Satan! I hope you may choke! So, he has found Elise De Martine, eh, whoever he is? Ha! ha! ha! that is a good joke. Ho! I would give a hundred dollars if I dared to laugh. Ho! ho!"—and aloud again, as he sat immobile, and spoke in a trembling way: "Look on the top shelf, gentlemen; the best wine is there. A rare brand it is, glorious!"

Worth Wynder was already at the closet, a portable affair that stood against the foundation wall. While he hastened to set forth three or four bottles of wine, some cold, sliced meat, and a variety of rich cake, all of which was kept there for the use of Stella Bellerayon, Crosier seated himself at the table, placing the pistol within reach.

"Haste, rascal!" he snapped, thumping the table with his fist. "Blood! I am most starved. Not a morsel since the afternoon of yesterday. See if there is something stronger than the wine! This fellow may have a private bottle of his own stowed away."

"Yours truly," returned Wynder, as he drew out a flat bottle labeled "whisky."

The two sat down to a tempting luncheon flavored by the sparkle and spice of excellent wine; and as Wynder crammed his capacious mouth, and imbibed freely, he twisted his snaky limbs around the legs of the chair, and helped himself to this and that and the other with the worm-like arms that darted out and in and up to his chin.

Crosier became silent. They had not parted of any food since noon on the day previous, and he forgot the reason for a while, curled his impatience philosophically in seizing this opportunity to refresh the inner man.

"But, I say, captain," Wynder inquired, as a huge bite vanished down his throat, and he helped himself to the sixth slice of sweet yellow cake, "if this really is Elise De Martine, whom we are about to liberate, pray, what—haugh! haugh! hang that last piece!"—tipping the bottle hurriedly, to wash down a morsel that nearly choked him—"Spf! haugh! what in the world are you going to do with her?"

"Why did I tend Alick Cassin at his death-bed? Why did I cross the ocean? Why have I consigned Jules Willoughby to his grave? You are an ass! Was it not that I might possess Elise De Martine for a wife?"

"Of course. Certainly. But, I mean, where are you going when you leave Willoughby? You won't stay here, you know."

"No. This man who calls himself Colonel Paul Gregor will return shortly."

"In which event he will find his captive gone."

"Rascal! why do you persist? Yes, he will find his captive gone, and if this fellow," rolling his eyes toward Thaddeus, "hears our plans, we will be pursued. Blockhead! he still."

"Oh!" thought the stabler, "he has crossed the ocean purposely to secure Elise De Martine? And he has buried Jules Willoughby, who, it appears, has been let loose since Alick Cassin has been dead—and this person—whatever he may be I can't imagine, since he is not Jules Willoughby, yet looks so much like him—tended Alick Cassin when he—the juggling apothecary!—died. He wants Elise for a wife?"

"—and he thinks that she is concealed behind the iron door? Good. But will not the colonel have my life as forfeit when he finds her missing? By the horn of Gabriel! I am a bad fix, and I can do nothing. And who, then, are these shrewd plotters?—how did they know there was anybody behind the iron door? He tugged slyly at his bonds, striving to free his hands; but Wynder had tied the knots with an experienced turn, and the stabler's efforts only cut the flesh of his wrists.

"Now, Worth Wynder, keep a sharp watch on that villain, while I bring out my prize," said Varian Crosier, rising at last and approaching the iron door, twirling the singular key which he had taken from the stabler's pocket; and he murmured, while his sickly face glowed and his serpent eyes glared: "Oh, my Elise! So near to you—already I feel you in my arms, your sweet mouth touching mine—your kiss me—joy! joy! I am coming, coming, Elise. Oh, blessed accident that brought me here and to you!" fitting the key in the padlock, and vanishing into the secret apartment.

"No—accursed accident!" exclaimed Thaddeus, behind his teeth: "for I shall get a stab, or a bullet, or a broken head, from Colonel Paul Gregor before I am a day older."

"Now, my fine fellow," squeaked Wynder, who continued his attack upon the cake and wine with only a hand, as with the other, he cocked the pistol and moved it slowly up and down, with the frowning muzzle leveled at Thaddeus, "if you should possibly stir, I will fire. This pistol, I perceive, and here he peeked into the barrel with one eye, "is loaded half-way to the top. A shot from it would undoubtedly blow your head off—how unpleasant it would be to have no head on your body, eh? It has quite a large bore; and the bullet," looking with the other eye, into the barrel, "would seem to have been made for just such a thick skull as yours. Hat don't move that foot again!"

"Point that another way!" cried Thaddeus, dodging his head, as Wynder aimed the weapon at him and grinned.

But we look into the secret room.

CHAPTER X.

CROSIER AND HIS PRIZE.

VARLAN CROSIER entered on tiptoe the silent apartment occupied by Stella Bellerayon.

The lovely woman was slumbering and dreaming on her soft couch, reclining there without having disrobed—a sight to tempt, like Bathsheba, the passion of a king, and still unsuspecting, unconsciously, the name of Jules Willoughby.

The beautiful picture, incased, as it were, in

the flowing draperies of the couch, and rendered both weird and heavenly by the colored rays of a swinging lamp which depended from the floor above; might well have awe the beholder, the invader of so rare a sanctuary.

The intruder paused. The vision, as it met his gaze, woke all the keenest fires of his sensual nature, plunging his mind in territories of forbidden thought, and thrilling him with a nameless, momentary ecstasy. He stood riveted—a wild, eager, passionate stare in his kindling orbs, and his whole frame quivering in excitement.

For several seconds he appeared to be spell-bound, held in check by the presence of this transcendent being, stupefied by his own daring, hesitating in the sacred precinct of virtue and its dreams.

But he did not long remain thus. Advancing quickly to the bedside, he looked down upon the face of the sleeper, clasping his hands beneath his chin and seeming joyed to frenzy by his silent feasting.

"Elise!—my beautiful Elise!" he called; then he leaned forward and gently touched the bare arm which he envied as it caressed her pure forehead.

The touch awakened her. She started up, frightened at the sudden interruption of her slumber, and the large, dark eyes flew open, bewildered, flashing, questioning.

Varian Crosier was kneeling and holding one of her hands; gazing eagerly up, raining kisses on that hand, which she pressed and toyed with in his own warm palms, and saying, huskily: "Elise, Elise, my queen, my love! I have come to set you free. I am going to take you away from this vile tomb. I am your deliverer. Smile upon me, Elise; look kindly upon your savior—who would root to the bowels of the earth after you—who would wade the corridors of perdition after you—who would snatch you from the angels of heaven, to possess you and make you happy. Glorious Elise! Speak to me with those lips of wine. Oh, my Elise!"

"Who are you?" interrogated the beauty, absently, drawing a hand across her eyes, as if not thoroughly aroused, and glancing wonderingly on the kneeling figure.

"I have come to rescue you from the villainy of Wilse De Martine," he answered. "No more silver serpents, no more deaths by drugs, no burials, no poison—but liberty—freedom for you, my beautiful Elise!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the beauty, leaning closer and scanning his features, "this is some pleasant dream. My head aches queerly. I think I know you; you are Jules Willoughby, come at last. What made you desert me, Jules?—it was so unkind. Where did my messenger find you?" and she smiled forgivingly as she put the question which chided the supposed Jules Willoughby for deserting her in former years; which indicates that Stella Bellerayon, if she was Elise De Martine, or whoever she was, still clinging to her affection for Jules Willoughby, who, at one time, it is plain, was her lover.

"Death on this infernal Jules Willoughby!" anathematized Crosier, mentally, but then a thought struck him: "Oh! she mistakes me for her old lover. I resemble him, it appears, and perhaps this may be of advantage to me, since he is out of the way. She is under the influence of that poisonous stuff, and dreams that I am he. 'Blood! When she recovers her senses, as she assuredly will soon, she may discover her error, prove obstinate, and give me trouble. I will play upon her credulity. Ho! I will act the role of Jules Willoughby, and marry her as quickly as possible."

All this revolved in the mind of Varian Crosier, rapidly as lightning flashes, and then he said: "Yes, dear Elise, I am your own true lover, Jules Willoughby, who has been searching for you ever since you were drugged and entombed by your heartless father, Wilse De Martine—searching for ten years. I have been on the point of killing myself, year by year, in my despair. But we will be happy now, eh, Elise? You will go with me at once—go with your Jules, and be married, won't you, my beautiful, my adored Elise?" Adding, inwardly: "The devil has scored that he against me, I am certain!"

"Yes, you are Jules. I know you, dear Jules!" said Stella, suddenly.

"Ho! She knows it? Good!" And to Stella: "Yes, my dear Elise, I am the miserable—your happy lover, I mean. Come with me."

"Why didn't you throw away that ring, Jules? Don't you recollect, I begged you to sink it in the river, because she gave it to you?" She pointed to the curious, glittering ring on his finger.

"Ah, my dear Elise—my queen—I forgot, I will hide it at once. You shall never see it again. When we go out into the world, it shall be ground to dust"—tearing off the ring, and thrusting it into his pocket, while he murmured: "Blood! she has seen the ring before. Where did she see it? Could this ring have belonged to Jules Willoughby?—then he had two sweethearts, and the rival of Elise was the 'she' who gave it to him. I got the ring from the man whom Alick Cassin had shut up in the room!"

"That's right," approved Stella. "You still love me, dear Jules. I hate that ring. You wear it on your right hand—now you wear it on your left hand—what became of her?"

"Devil take her!" exclaimed Varian Crosier, mentally. "Who does she mean by 'her'—it must have been some rival for the love of the apothecary's clerk. 'Blood and fire! I wrung this ring from the left hand of the man whom I let loose at the command of Alick Cassin. She takes me for Jules Willoughby, and if the ring belonged to him, then the man I liberated was the accused apothecary's clerk. 'Death! Had I suspected it, I would have shot him down when he grappled my collar! But he did not look the same then—he did not resemble my brother, Jared Crosier, as he does now." And aloud: "Yes, my beautiful Elise, I changed it some time ago—while I was faithfully hunting for you. I am done with it now, forever."

"Why do you call me 'Elise'? What has become of Elise De Martine?" queried the beauty.

"Eh?" The question was so sudden and so significant that it startled him; "but he thought immediately: 'Oh, yes, I see: that abominable drug fuddles her ideas, till she scarcely recollects who she is.'"

"You don't care for Elise De Martine any more, do you, dear Jules?"

"Don't care for her?" exclaimed Varian Crosier, warmly. "I worship her! I adore her! I would die for her—almost! I am going to marry her. It shall be my delight to tend to her whims, her likes, her wants. I—" he paused in astonishment at the effect of his declarations.

Stella Bellerayon glared at him from her great black eyes, and he could hear her fine white teeth grating as if with rage, while her hands clenched and worked nervously.

"I hate Elise De Martine!" she hissed, bringing her flushed face close, until her breath fanned his forehead. "I despise mention of her! And if I had her now, I could kill her! If you love her, you cannot love me. A loyal heart can own but a single love. But, you are deceiving

me, dear Jules"—her tone and mien resuming their former gentleness—"you don't mean that? You do not care for Elise De Martine, do you?"

For a second, Crosier was dumfounded. But again he thought: "Malediction on that poisonous drug! She hates herself—she would kill herself if she were here! How pitiable. Her reason is completely gone. I could, with pleasure, strangle that so-called Colonel Paul Gregor!" And aloud: "Yes, I despise her, too, if you command me to do so! I hate everybody and everything that is distasteful to you, my beautiful—my—"

"Don't call me 'Elise'—quickly, and frowning. 'My name is Stella Bellerayon.'"

"So it shall be, then; Stella Bellerayon—Bellerayon, Stella! Stella! Stella! My beautiful Stella!"

"And will you take me out of here?" she asked, smiling upon him, and causing his heart to thump with delight. "How did you pass the jailer outside?"

"Easily enough, my glorious Stella De Martine—Bellerayon—rayon"—and finally pronouncing the name correctly several times, as he noted how well it satisfied her, "we tied him fast, and I have a man watching him. We need apprehend nothing from him."

"You tied him? Oh, I am so glad of that, dear Jules!—for he might harm you. He is a brute. When he takes me to walk in the dull groves, or through the castle, he makes me sing and weep; and if I do not cry loud enough, he pinches me—"

"I'll have his life!" snarled Crosier. "He pinches you?—the dog! I shall bring him to a jelly from head to foot! But, come, Stella—my beautiful, my angel—come."

Yes, dear Jules, I will go. I feel so happy since you have come back to me."

"Let us hasten, then," he urged, thinking of the precious little time they had for flight before the possible return of Colonel Paul Gregor.

She permitted him to lead her from the apartment, clinging to his arm with a fondness that set his veins to burning and his head to swimming.

"Behold her!" he announced, emerging from the iron doorway, to rejoin his follower—and his voice was tinged with the enthusiasm of illimitable joy.

At the moment he stepped beyond the arch, bringing his prize triumphantly forward, the enormous pistol, with which Wynder was guarding the stabler, exploded with a deafening report. And Worth Wynder, himself, was heard squealing in piercing, terrified accents: "Help, captain!—help! He is beating me to death! Oh, Lord! Help—quick!"

(To be continued—Commenced in No. 201.)

RED ARROW.

THE WOLF DEMON;

The Queen of the Kanawha.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.
AUTHOR OF "ROCKY MOUNTAIN ROB," "THE MAN FROM TEXAS," "OVERLAND KIT," "RED MAZEPA," "A LIFE OF RECKLESSNESS," "HEART OF FIRE," "WITCHES OF NEW YORK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE LAST OF THE DEMON.

A LOOK of triumph swept over the blood-stained face of the Wolf Demon as he looked upon the lifeless form of the Shawnee warrior.

From the cut in the head of the Wolf the blood was slowly trickling, but he did not seem to mind the hurt.

With a hoarse cry of joy he knelt by the side of the man whom he had strangled to death with his powerful arms.

He tore the hunting-shirt from the breast of the dead chieftain; then he drew the dead man's knife from his girdle.

Three rapid flashes and the Red Arrow, graven in the flesh, was blazoned on the breast of the Shawnee warrior.

"Inhuman dog, more like the wolf in heart than I, thus do I mark you," the Wolf Demon cried in a voice hoarse with passion. "Eleven red demons slew the Red Arrow: eleven Shawnee warriors have I slain. Not one of the murdering band has escaped my steel. She fell in the blazing cabin amid the great green wood, near where the Muskingum waters laugh and play. The assassins have fallen in the glade and in the woodland, by the banks of the Scioto and the Ohio, in the paths of the Shawnee village and by the lodge-fires of the Chillicothe. I have struck them down by night and by day. And on each breast, in memory of the Indian maid that I once loved so well, have I stamped the Red Arrow. Now, at last, the chief of the red band of slayers has felt the edge of the scalping-knife. My work is done—my mission ended, and now, death, take me for thine own." The Wolf Demon rose to his feet and glared wildly around him. His eyes were starting from their sockets and gleamed like balls of fire.

"What is this I see?" he cried suddenly; "a river of blood! It is the blood of the red warriors that have fallen by my hand, and she the loved and lost is in its center. She beckons me to her. I see her as plainly as I did an hour ago when she sprang from the earth in the woodland glade by the hollow oak, to save the young Indian warrior from my vengeance. I know that he was not one of the assassin band that took thy life, but in his veins ran the blood of the accursed Shawnees, and I had doomed him to the death. But I spared him. Did you not come from thy spirit home among the blessed and lift up thy hand to stay my arm? Go on, I'll follow thee! Death is near. It is welcome, for it brings me to thee, my love. I hear the song of angels in mine ears! I am coming."

"Slowly, with his eyes fixed vacantly on the air, the Wolf Demon came from the lodge, descended the bank, and hid by it from sight, left the Shawnee village.

Boone and Kenton from their ambush perceived him approach.

Boone touched Kenton on the arm as if to call his attention, but Kenton had already perceived the terrible figure.

"Shall we fire at him?" questioned Kenton, in a whisper, and the usually firm hand of the borderer trembled as he fumbled with the lock of his gun.

"No, no!" cried Boone, quickly, and in a cautious whisper: "the report would bring the hull of the Shawnee village down upon us, just like stirring up a nest of hornets."

"What shall we do, then?"

"We'll follow and attack him in the forest," answered Boone.

The Wolf Demon came slowly on, his eyes staring full upon the air before him. He passed by the ambush of the two woodmen and entered the thicket.

As he passed, the two noted the signs of a conflict so apparent upon him.

"Just look at his face! It's kivered all over with blood!" exclaimed Boone, in wonder.

"He's fixed another Shawnee, I reckon," said Kenton, seriously.

"Sim, it's a terrible thing to attack this

awful critter," said Boone, with a grave look upon his honest face.

"But the death of poor Lark—"

"Must be avenged!" exclaimed the old hunter, compressing his lips together, firmly.

"That's so," said Kenton, with a pale face and a throbbing heart, yet with undaunted courage.

"I didn't see as he had any weapons, but if he's the devil, he don't need any. Come on, we'll give him a tussle, anyway. Lord, I wish I could remember a prayer or two," said Boone, seriously.

Then with cautious steps they followed on the trail of the Wolf Demon.

The singular being pursued the same path returning that he had taken in coming through the wood.

He moved so slow that the two in pursuit followed him without difficulty.

Every now and then he halted for a moment and then again went on.

His steps became irregular. The hunters, following close behind, noticed that he was reeling like a drunken man.

From side to side he swayed as he made his way through the forest.

He reached the little glade by the side of which stood the hollow oak.

"Let's attack him in the glade!" cried Boone, as he and Kenton reached the edge of the opening and beheld the Wolf Demon standing motionless, as if irresolute, in the center of it.

"Come on, then," said Boone, as he started to fire for fear of the report arousing the Indian village—the two scouts dashed into the opening.

Hearing the noise of their footsteps, the Wolf Demon turned, extended his arm as if to stay their progress, and then, with a heavy groan, fell sideways to the ground. The sudden shock burst the wolf-head from its fastenings to the body, and it rolled away from the prostrate figure.

The scouts halted in astonishment.

The wolf-head gone, the head of a man, covered with light, clustering curls, was revealed to their gaze.

Quickly they knelt by the side of the Wolf Demon and wiped the blood and war-paint from his face.

The superstitious fear of the woodmen was all gone now, for they knew that it was a human form that lay extended on the earth before them.

The terrible Wolf Demon was dying. The tomahawk of the Shawnee had given him his death-wound. The strong limbs, once so powerful, were now made feeble by the near approach of that terrible mystery that human mind never yet has solved.

The two scouts lifted up the head of the dying man. His eyes opened slowly, and, with a vacant look, he gazed around him.

"Oh, what a terrible dream!" he murmured, faintly.

The woodmen bent their heads, eagerly, to listen.

"It seems as if I have waded through a river of blood—fresh, warm blood, gushing, freely, from terrible wounds. I dreamed that I had been changed into a wolf, a beast with a human soul, and in that soul one thought only, vengeance on the Shawnee nation. In the light and in the darkness I sought that vengeance. The red braves fell around my path as the wheat falls around the reaper, yet I staid not my hand, for the cry went up for blood, rivers of it. On each victim I cut my mark, a Red Arrow, in remembrance of the wife that the red demons tore from me a year ago by the Muskingum. I was gifted with the cunning of the maniac, for at times I am mad. The wound on my head, that I received from a falling raft on that fearful night when my wife was killed, affected my brain. In my madness I must have dreamed all these terrible things. I dreamed that I fashioned myself a wolf-skin like a wolf, and then struck down my foes. A hollow oak in the forest was my home; there I concealed my wolf-skin when my mad-fit was over. Oh! it was a terrible dream."

Boone and Kenton exchanged glances; they knew that the dream was a reality.

Then the eyes of the stricken man, glaring around him, fell upon the strange disguise that covered his person.

"What is this?" he cried, in horror; "the skin of a wolf! Then it is not a dream. No, no, I see all clearly now; the near approach of death has cleared my eyes upon the truth. In my madness I have been like an avenging angel to the Shawnee nation. I see their tall forms around me now—muscular warriors—the tomahawk cut in on their skulls, and on their breast is graven in lines of warm blood the emblem of vengeance, the Red Arrow!"

Exhausted by the outburst, his head sunk back upon the knee of Boone.

"Heaven have mercy on his soul," said the rough old Indian-fighter, solemnly.

Kenton turned his head aside to brush away a tear. He had seen many a death-scene, but none like this.

Again the dying man raised his head. A soft light now gleamed in his blood-shot eyes.

"I see you," and he extended his hand feebly toward the thicket. Kenton and Boone looked in amazement, but they beheld nothing. The sight was visible to the eyes of the stricken man, alone.

"See, she beckons me to come—no more blood, but peace—peace and love eternal. I will come—see! she is there amid the cloud, I come—wait."

With a stifled gasp his head sunk back.

Boone could not repress a shudder, for he felt that he held a corpse in his arms.

No more would the Wolf Demon carry terror to the hearts of the Shawnee warriors.

With their hunting-knives the two scouts scooped a shallow grave beneath the boughs of the hollow oak, and there, by the pale light of the dying moon, they placed the mortal remains of Abe Lark, the terrible Wolf Demon, the white husband of the Indian girl—Ke-ne-ha's daughter—"The Red Arrow."

legend, that he should ever give to the world the story of the Red Arrow and the Wolf Demon.

THE END.

KENTUCK, THE SPORT.

A STORY OF

Injun Dick's Life and Adventures

IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA.

In tracing the history of Richard Talbot, the Injun Dick of "Overland Kit" and "Rocky Mountain Rob," Mr. Aiken came upon some passages of his life in connection with a mining enterprise in the valley of the Upper Shasta, in Northern California, which had before escaped his notice. "Injun Dick" is no creation of fiction formed in the author's brain, but a living man who once played a wonderful part in the stirring, blood-thrilling pioneer life of the far Pacific slope. Stories of "Cherokee," as "Injun Dick" was commonly called in Walla Walla, in '59, are still told in that region. By rare good luck, a disjointed account of Talbot's heroic fight for the Chinabur Mine reached Mr. Aiken, and readily perceiving how interesting a tale might be told of the thrilling events that transpired under the shadows of great Shasta's snowy peak; he set to work to join the scattered fragments, and the result is "Kentuck, the Sport," a few more chapters in the checkered life of Richard Talbot.

Probably in no work from Mr. Aiken's pen does he deal with so many strange yet truthful characters; first, we have Talbot, still the same clear-headed, quick-witted man as in the days of yore; "Kentuck," the gambler, his deadly foe, another man of ice of the Talbot class, but without his honesty or courage; Conington, the busy speculator, who imagines that money can buy anything; the "original" Joe Bowers, the hammer, a creation equal to the immortal Man-from-Rod-Go; and then the Queen of the Shasta tribe, Yeta, (the Moon), her heart filled with a devouring love for the pale and bearded stranger; the brother, Heema-Nanga (Sun-man)—descendant of ancient Montezuma, lord of Mexico; and then the daring foe both of the Shasta tribe and of the white settlers in the valley, Koo-chwe (the Hog)—the warlike chieftain of the McCloud Indians.

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A MOVING TAIL.

When I was quite an urchin boy,
More than some years ago,
To pasture did I drive the cows,
And Brindle was quite slow.
She always seemed to lag behind,
Which interfered quite much
With kites and marbles, tops and balls,
And other games like such.

One morn'g with lots of play to do,
I caught her by the tail,
All to accelerate her speed,
When straightway she made sail.
So sudden did she start to run,
I could not well let go.
Lost I should tumble summersets
Not wonderfully slow.

Away she ran; and fifteen foot
I took at every leap,
Straight up and down to keep.
So fast she went along the lane,
I'm willing to be bound
I made two dozen steps in air
Before I touched the ground.

"Whoa, whoa," I cried, "old Brindle, stop!
Old Brindle won't you whoa?
And I'll let go of you, old cow,
If you will let me go!"
Right by the old grist-mill we flew;
Out jumped old Miller Kline:
"Why don't you check that animal?
Pull harder on the line!"

We didn't stop, but on we sped,
And out the window Jacques
Ran, crying wildly, "Sook! sook! sook!"
And, "Lors a marcy sakes!"
Right past old Parson Miggins we flew,
As fast as we could go.
"So!" cried that reverend gentleman,
"But ah, wouldn't 'so'!"

My hat flew off far down the lane;
My shoes they followed too.
The people said they went so high
They were quite lost to view.
Old farmer Giles ran to his gate
And waved his hat and said,
"Young man, there isn't any use
To try to get ahead!"

Now I began to touch the ground
Once every fifty feet,
And Brindle galloped wildly on,
Bound in this race to beat.
Old Squire Green screamed out in grief,
"Why don't you let her go?"
In pain I cried that "Twenty men
Could not do that, you know!"

But I held on, for really
I'd nothing else to do;
She turned and jumped some fences, and
I followed after, too.
At last, as all things have an end,
I got a awful shock,
Three summersets I turned aloft,
And landed in a ditch.

Strange Stories.

THE RED COLUMNS;
or,
The Gamester's Oath.
A LEGEND OF VENICE.

BY AGILE PIERRE.

THE decree had gone forth, signed with the great seal of the State, that from that day forth no games of chance were to be permitted to be practiced within the limits of the city, over which floated the broad banner, bearing the Winged Lion of San Mark.

All the bloods of Venice were aghast; loudly they murmured at the harsh decree, and swore good round oaths that the Doge, Domenico Micheli, must be mad to issue such an edict.

But it had been issued and was to be enforced. The grave fathers of the sea-washed city, queen of the Adriatic wave, feared lest by luxury and vice, the vital force of their republic, their young, brave and hardy nobility, would be corrupted, and so, after long debate, Dame Fortune's minions were bid to flee and seek for harbor elsewhere.

Venice then was at its topmost light of her prosperity. The crusades were over; no city in Lombardy could compare with her in wealth or strength.

"Her daughters had their dower
From spoils of nations, and the exhaustless East
Poured in her lap all gems in sparkling showers."

In the grand square of San Mark stood a group of young nobles, busily engaged in discussing the astonishing edict.

"It is a bitter shame!" cried a tall and handsome gallant, who seemed to be the leading spirit of the group. "Are we children that the Doge shall say whether we shall risk our ducats or not? I woe that he has forgotten how we young gallants periled life and limb in the service of the republic against the Turk."

The speaker was called Enrico Faletti; by birth second to none in Venice; in wit and courage with hardly an equal in the city. A man of great talents; renowned for his skill in the art of war; famous for his cool judgment in the time of peace; as skillful with the pencil as a painter's favorite, gifted with the talent to use the sculptor's chisel, and possessing most wonderful genius for all the details of the architect. One fault only had Enrico, a love of play. No votary of the fickle goddess Fortune as constant as he. From vespers to early morn, all night long, the gaming-table held him captive. Other gallants would glide over the moonlit waters, in the evening hour, and wake the soft echoes of the night with a lute as they sang the praises of some fair lady beneath her lattice window.

Not so with Enrico; no fair-faced damsel for him, as long as he could win or lose the golden ducats. There was more music in their metallic ring, as they clinked upon the table, than in the sweetest laugh of the fairest lady that ever sun shone on.

"I suppose as it is the law we must submit," quoth another of the knot of loungers.

"Not I; by the four bronze horses of San Mark, I swear it!" Enrico exclaimed, hotly. "Come to my palace, by the canal Orfano, to-night, and you shall see the gold chink as merrily on the board as ever. No, gentlemen, believe me, the Doge will never be able to enforce his edict. As easily could he raise yonder red columns, and place them as he intended before his palace, the one crowned by the Winged Lion, and the other with the statue of our patron, holy Saint Theodore. That task he has not accomplished, nor will he succeed in this. When the columns are up, then gaming may stop in Venice; not before."

The speaker referred to two massive columns of red granite, which had been brought from the East by one of the Doges as trophies in the year 1182. Fabulous sums had been offered by the Doge to any architect who should be able to erect them, capped by the statues spoken of by the young soldier. But not a man possessed genius enough for the task, although at least a hundred skillful men had essayed the effort. At last, in despair, the Doge, with the consent of the Senate, had made proclamation that he would grant any reward that might be asked to the man who succeeded in erecting the pillars. But, as yet, the genius capable of solving the problem had not appeared.

The group of young men soon after broke up, and within an hour it was known throughout

Venice that the reckless Enrico intended to defy the edict of the Doge.

True to his word, the young noble entertained his friends that night, and after the wine-cup had passed freely around, the company began to woo the goddess, Fortune.

Not an hour had they been engaged in play, when a trembling servant rushed into the room and made the startling announcement that the soldiers of the republic had entered the house.

The first thought of the hot-headed young nobles was to resist the intrusion; but the Doge had foreseen that such might be their action, and so he had dispatched such an overwhelming array, that even the rashest could not deny that force was fruitless.

In the damp and gloomy dungeons of the Carceri, Enrico Faletti and his friends slept that night.

In the morning they were all brought before the Doge in the Council Hall of the palace. Scant in speech and stern in manner was the Venetian ruler.

Briefly he informed the rash young men that the law of Venice read alike to the slave and to the noble. What was forbidden to one, the other could not enjoy. But in this matter, believing that the wrongful act was more the result of thoughtlessness than of wilful design to evade the law of the republic, he should therefore assess a fine of a hundred ducats upon all except Enrico Faletti; but for him, the giver of the fete, a fine of a thousand ducats, and three months' confinement in the arsenal he should impose.

Enrico was hot with rage, but not so blind with passion as further to enrage the Doge by any hasty act.

The fines were paid, and the imprisonment was over.

Enrico walked forth a free man, and greatly altered too, for the joyous smile common to his face was gone, and a sullen, melancholy expression had taken its place.

Each day of the three months that he had spent in the confinement of the Arsenal, he had cursed the Doge and the Senate of Venice, morning, noon, and night; and a thousand times at least, he had sworn to be avenged for the slight that had been put upon him.

Day and night, after his release, he vainly racked his brain to devise some means of accomplishing his vengeance, without sacrificing himself.

Walking one moonlight night in the grand square, wrapped in his mantle, brooding as usual upon the one thought that was ever uppermost in his mind, his eyes fell upon the two red columns lying prostrate upon the Quay.

"By the Winged Lion, I have it!" he cried, excited, as he looked upon the trophies of Venetian prowess.

After that night Enrico was seen no more in Venice for a good six months. He had gone abroad for study, so it was given out, and many marvelled at the idea.

Six months and Enrico Faletti stood again in Venice; straight he sought the Doge in the Council Hall amid the Senate.

Kindly Micheli welcomed the noble, for he knew well his worth, and wished to remove from his mind the remembrance of his offense and punishment.

Straight came Faletti to the point he wished: "To the man who will erect the two red columns of granite now lying on the Quay, and crown them with the statues of the Winged Lion and Saint Theodore, you have promised whatever reward he may ask."

"Such is the truth," replied the Doge, wondering at Faletti's words.

"I will essay the task," the noble said.

"The Doge and the wise men of the Senate stared in astonishment."

"And if I perform the task will you grant the reward I ask?" the noble continued.

"Most assuredly," replied the Doge, and the Senate confirmed the words.

Faletti at once set to work. Strange devices of ropes and beams he had brought with him from abroad, and it was evident that, during his absence, he had studied deeply in the architect's lore.

Two months and a day, and the red columns stood proudly erect, the one crowned by the Winged Lion of San Mark, the other with a counterfeit presentment of good Saint Theodore.

And now all Venice held her breath in anxiety to learn the reward claimed by the skillful Faletti.

"A simple favor only," said Enrico, smiling covertly. "I demand that it shall be considered lawful to play all games of chance in Venice in the open space between these two pillars," and he pointed to the red granite columns.

Doge and Senate alike had pledged their word, and there was no retracting with honor. A short consultation the Doge and Council held together, and then the aged ruler of the republic spoke:

"The boon is granted; it shall be lawful to play all games of chance in the space between these two columns after six o'clock to-morrow morning."

The assemblage dispersed. Faletti had triumphed, and the young bloods of Venice drained many a flask of Cypress wine that night in his honor.

At six in the morning, some twenty wild young blades, headed by Faletti, sought the space between the columns to celebrate their victory.

But they found the spot already occupied. The hearseman's axe was flashing in the air, and the blood of the criminals was staining the stone beneath. Henceforth the Doge had decreed all executions should take place between the columns.

The gallants recoiled in dismay. Who would think gold where blood had been. The Doge and Senate triumphed after all.

Crystal's Love.

BY MARY KEND CROWELL.

An artist's studio, looking like a tiny bit of fairy-land, with its delicate light green velvet carpet that covered the floor in one unbroken expanse; with its stained-glass windows, through which the brilliant sunlight shone in daintily-hued tints over marble statuettes and glittering bronzes.

On the pale pink wall were ranged choice paintings; in the elegant portfolio were drawings and tiny pictures; on the easel a blank canvas that would one day be instinct with the glowing ideal already complete in Crystal Vandellene's stately head. Now, standing beside her easel, with her sketching crayon in her hand—a large, white, womanly hand with a wide plain circlet of gold at the wrist that matched the ring on the fore-finger of her other hand—Max Llewellyn thought what a blissful fate was his that it had been permitted him to woo and win this peerless girl for his very own; she, whom princes would have been proud to know.

Besides her talent—her glorious, God-given talent that had placed her, with her own proud, untiring efforts, so high above other women's

heads, he was thinking of her wondrous beauty, her grace, her rare, pure sweetness; what a favored one of the Fates Crystal Vandellene was!

And to him, in exchange for the humble adoration he gave her, this queen of women had promised her love, had pledged her faith; and Max felt the loud, fast beating of his heart as he looked upon her.

With a sudden little gesture of weariness, she laid aside her crayon, and walked to his side, on the little azure and pink damask sofa.

"I am afraid the 'Battle of the Roses' will take me longer than I anticipated, especially as I will have to hunt up a model for one of my warriors."

Her smooth, exquisitely modulated voice fell on his ears like music. He made room on the sofa beside him, glancing down the long room at a quiet, graceful little figure in the bay-window.

Crystal followed his glance, and smiled archly.

Laure is contented, Max, with her reading and the plans. Am not I enough for your amusement?"

She laid her cool, firm hand on his blonde hair, and looked down in his blue, glittering eyes.

"My amusement, my darling! when you know that I am in paradise when you are at my side. As you say, your sister is content with her books and flowers, while I, with you, am more than content."

Crystal smiled indulgently.

"Oh, Max, what a fond flatterer you are growing to be! But, tell me, who is to be my bold warrior?"

A dark flush surged over Llewellyn's fair face.

"I thought—didn't you say—couldn't I—preceded Crystal's answer.

"You darling ignoramus! as if my model must not be a martial-looking, splendid man, with dark hair, eyes, and a commanding presence, that shall inspire me. Like—like Julian Engle, you know."

She darted him a sidelong glance from under the veiling fringes of her bright blue eyes. Doubtless she had anticipated an unusual effect of her words; but she was utterly unprepared for the perfect gust of passion to which he gave vent.

"Julian Engle! Julian Engle sit to you, to you, my treasure! He will come between us just as surely as darkness shuts out the light! Crystal, my darling, I cannot permit this; I dare not have him here, day after day, feasting on your beauty, and with his own teaching you to forget me!"

His blue eyes had a feverish glow, and he had sprung from his easy, reclining position, and stood in a strangely mingled passion of menace and entreaty, directly before.

Her own eyes, blue as the June sky, glowed with a faint red gleam; her cheeks had flushed like a rose, but her voice was perfectly even and low, and sweet in her answer.

"I am sorry, indeed, Max, that I have so unfortunately aroused your unnecessary jealousy. I wear your ring, Max."

Her tones were a little firmer, a trifle indignant, and just a little less sweet when she finished her remark.

He, all contrition, raised his hand and pressed it against his mustache.

"You wear the badge, but I am the slave. Only—do you love me, Crystal?"

She smiled slowly; then the smile developed into one of her own melodious laughs.

"You unreasonable boy! you know well enough without answer. Hark! Laurie, did you say some one wanted me?" Then, to Llewellyn, lightly—"Good-bye, Max; one of my patrons is come."

She glided over the grass-green carpet, her white trailing dress making a soft rustle as she went. And Max watched her, with a heavy, nameless pain around his heart, then, with a curt bow to Laurie Vandellene, left the studio.

The "Battle of the Roses" was fought; at least Crystal Vandellene had just put it all on canvas, only that now, when there was no need for any more retouching, when there was no more possible need of Julian Engle's coming any more, Crystal lingered lovingly, tremblingly beside the easel, with a strange light flooding her sunshiny eyes, and a peculiar unrest in her fingers.

Of late days she had grown quite unlike herself. Usually so self-poised, so self-contained that no external affairs had power to affect her, she had come to start at the sound of a man's footstep on the studio stairs, to blush painfully when Max looked at her, to shrink strangely when Julian Engle's sitting were lawfully over, and he lingered among her art beauties.

To-day there had been the last of these; her warrior, in all the glory of war-plumes and battle array was so like Julian Engle that her very heart ached. She had caught the very wave in his hair, the proud curve of his lips, the firm clasp of his hand on his sword-hilt, only, somehow, somehow, instead of the warlike, defiant look she meant to have put in his eyes, there was a certain proud triumph, mingled with intensest longing; an expression she had caught one day, when she glanced unexpectedly from her canvas and met his brown eyes; a gaze that haunted her, sleeping or waking, whether she would or no.

But now it was done; and they stood before the easel in silence, long and unbroken; she, the artist, the lovely woman with the yellow gold hair, the heaven-blue eyes, the averted face, the quivering fingers that toyed with brush and palette. He, in all the might and strength of a manhood as perfect mentally and morally as physically.

And—

Of a sudden—for the life of her, Crystal could not tell why she did it—she lifted her eyes to his splendid face; and he, whose magnetic glance had certainly made her turn, smiled with a consciousness of power, a surety of triumph, pressed her finger lightly through every vein of her body.

"Crystal! Crystal! my own! come to me."

When she heard his voice, when she saw his outstretched arms waiting to take her, her into their embrace forever, then she recognized her soul's lord; then she knew, with a fearful pang of blissful pain, that she was "his own," of a verity.

With a little cry, like a bird startled from its nest, Crystal stood transfixed where she was, one short second, wondering, doubting, hoping, fearing—fearing most, for she felt her engagement pressing her finger like a fetter of red-hot iron, then, with one surging wave of unutterable, irrepresible love, that would go whithersoever it were sent, she darted to his arms, and hid her face on his shoulder, while he strained her, in a wordless embrace, tightly to his breast.

It was blissful—sweet beyond all other sweets life had offered her, and life had not been niggardly to Crystal Vandellene; but, with all the bliss, all the sweetness, there uprose Max Llewellyn's face, pale as death, with its passionate German blue eyes; and she struggled to free herself.

"Julian," she whispered his name almost under her breath, "Julian, I am so wicked,

how can I be so false to Max—my friend and yours! Julian, forgive me, and promise to forget it all."

An awful storm of duty and inclination, warring like unchained elements, raged in the girl's breast; her own pure heart, never till this moment awakened to know its intense desire to be loved, its great capacity of loving, clamored with all her fresh young life to cling to this man who had unsealed the fountain with his master touch; and ranged in grim, uncompromising array, in one unbroken, invulnerable front, stood the legions of honor, of duty, of conscience, and their marshal and leader was Max Llewellyn.

Her face was pale as death. Her eyes glittered like stars; she bowed her regal head as if to let the storm pass over; and then she raised her pitiful, beautiful face.

"It must never be again, Julian. I am pledged to him, and I must be true, if it breaks my heart."

"Then you do love me, my darling? Tell me, and I will try to obey you and leave you. As you say, Max is my friend and yours, and does not deserve such treatment at our hands. But tell me, darling, do you love me?"

Then her voice rose in a perfect wall of anguish.

"I do! I do! heart and soul, Julian, Julian!"

His lip trembled; it was hard, hard to go, leaving such wealth behind; but honor, and he was honorable, pointed with inexorable finger.

He laid his hand on the door-handle; and then some one on the outside turned it in his hand; and Max Llewellyn came in, white as a ghost, with haunting eyes and steady step.

He staggered to the little divan where he and Crystal sat, that day, where he seemed to foresee this all.

"Don't go," he said, hoarsely. "I happened to hear it all, old fellow, and I don't blame you. She is so sweet, who could help it? And she should love you—you suit her better than I; only I loved her so."

He covered his face with his hand, and a solemn silence fell on the three.

Then he suddenly sprang up, and caught Crystal by the wrist.

"I give you to him—you want him, he wants you. You hear? for your sake, the only woman I ever loved. I murder my own happiness. Good-bye forever."

He walked, as in a dream, out of her presence forever; a man who sacrificed more than life for the woman he loved.

And Crystal?

Her step was slow, her eyes sad for many days; and when, at length, she saw how right it all had been, what a blessed promise of happiness lay at her acceptance, she sent for Julian and bade him take her—Max's gift.

Not was the golden promise unfulfilled.

Forecastle Yarns.

The Mad Skipper.

BY C. D. CLARK.

"TWAS in the year '36, ez nigh ez I kin make the reckenin', said Marlin, otherwise 'Slush Bucket,' as we lay under the equator, homeward-bound, that I shipped in New Bedford, in the bark Nancy Jane. A neat critter she was, a little too broad in the bow, and a bit crank at beating, but weatherly, take her all in all—and a good sea-boat. I never see the skipper till after we left Rio, and ef I had may I be blowed ef I'd ever shipped under him."

A dead face and a living body, mates—the face of a man that had done some dreadful deed and was followed by a ghost he couldn't lay, nohow. It were awful to see him, mates. An old sea-dog, tall and slim, with the breadth of the salt-sea about him, but that pale, ghastly face, and that look over his shoulder when no sound could be heard.

The fast Dickey sent me down to ask for a sextant below Rio, and when I see'd that face I'd have given my chances of grog, slumgullion, lobsouse, and plum-duff for life to be out of that cussid Nancy Jane. He see'd the look in my face, and snatched up a belaying pin, and made a stroke at me.

"You are like the rest, you useless lubber!" he howled. "What the devil do you all see in my face that you must start when you see me as if you had seen a ghost? A ghost! Ha!"

He looked over his shoulder again in that quick, startled way, and dropped the pin. Something I could not see scared him, and drove the little color out of his face.

"Keep off!" he hissed. "Stand by me, Marlin, and I'll be your friend for life. Strike at it; beat it to the earth, and tread it under foot! See how pale and hollow he looks, and how ghastly that mark is—the mark of Cain the slayer. Ha! he's gone. Now, Marlin, what the devil do you want?"

I told him, and got the sextant, but made up my mind I wa'n't going into that cabin again ef I could help it. I thought he had snakes in his boots, but it turned out wuss than that, a blamed sight. I didn't see him again for three days, and the Dickey seemed to sail the ship. I was standing forward one afternoon, looking at the sea overhead, when the Dickey came and stood by me.

"Going to have a dirty time, Marlin," he said, glancing at the sky. "We'll hev to take in our kites before three hours."

Mr. Mosby was a good officer, and we respected him as such. I give him my manners—I allus does that when an officer uses me as a man, and I sez:

"Tain't many could make bad weather out of that sky, Mr. Mosby, but you're right all the same. We'll hev a blow-out afore sun-up. 'Twill be likely to bring the skipper on deck."

"I hope not," he said in a kind of uneasy way. "It would be better for him to stay below to-night, I think."

There was something in the way he said it that made me look kind o' wild at him. The idea that a skipper wouldn't be on deck when all hands was called was bad enough, but that was suthin' in the way he said it that puzzled me.

"Mr. Mosby, I sez, 'scuse the liberty, but what's the matter with the skipper?"

"Matter! You forget yourself, Marlin; go aloft and make those points fast. I see that some lubber has tied them with granny knots. No worse; and don't repeat the offense."

I kinder went away from him when he said that. I allus do when it looks like the old man would like to have me, because you know what a sailor is. Before the first watch was over I heard the mate at the fore-scuttle.

"Hi, you, timbrees! Rouse and shake yourselves. Tumble up—tumble up there. All hands on deck, ahoy!"

All hands! Mr. Marlin never hesitates when he hears that call, but shows a leg with cheerfulness, because a little lively work on his part may keep him away from Davy Jones. And Mr. Mosby never called "all hands" unless it was needful. Up we rolled, to find the sky all black with clouds and great forked flashes of lightning running through them.

"Away, you sea-draft," roared the mate—"Lay out there, lively. Strip her, strip her, my sons. She don't want as much clothes as a South-Sea woman."

We didn't need much ordering, for we saw the danger, and in five minutes the Nancy Jane was ready for business.

"Lay down from aloft," we heard the order. "Here it comes."

We slid down rather lively, and had hardly struck the decks when it came down with a "who!" The Nancy Jane keeled until her yards touched the water, and then, as the men at the wheel let her go round, she came up out of the surge, and was off like a scared bird.

We never saw the Nancy Jane on a wind, let it blow as it would, ef we didn't meet suthin'.

I was standing by the rail, holding on to a rail-line, when I heard such a cry as I never want to hear again, and there was the skipper, holding a lantern in his hand.

"Hi, there, Mr. Mosby! What are you doing, you lubber? Do you dare strip the Nancy Jane without asking me?"

"Mr. Webster—captain," replied the mate, turning white as a ghost. "I—I did not like to disturb you."

"Cowards!" yelled the skipper, jumping on the quarter-deck with his gray hair floating in the wind. "Lay her a course—keep her to it. Do you hear, there at the wheel?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Keep her S.E.E."

"But, captain!" gasped the mate. "For the love of heaven, don't cast away the ship!"

"Mutiny, by—" screamed the skipper. "Ha, ha, ha! here is more work for me to do. Wait till I lay her a course, and then I'll make you sweat blood. Aloft there, and shake out everything that will draw. Lay aloft; I've mind me."

"Boys," cried the mate, jumping up on the deck, "this man is mad. Secure him, and take your orders from me."

Before we could stop him the mad skipper drew a pistol and fired at the mate, who dropped on the quarter-deck. We ran in to seize the madman, who was making for the wheel, but he slipped by us and jumped on the lee rail.

"Ha! curse your white faces. I've done it again," he screamed. "Do you think I will live with two such faces on my track? Hurrah for a grave in the sea!"

He flung his lantern out upon the water, threw up his hands, and plunged head-first into the boiling surge, and was half a mile away in three minutes. At the same time the mate rose upon his elbow and stood up, staggering.

"All right, boys," he said. "I would have saved him ef I could, but it could not be done. His bullet grazed my skull and stunned me."

So Mr. Mosby was skipper of the Nancy Jane, and a good one he was. He told